8
壊れた魔術師の未来
鏡貴也
TAKAYA KAGAMI
大伝説の勇者の伝説
ファンタジア文庫

「……あ～、ええと、俺さ……
おまえのことが
好きみたいだ、フェリス」
大伝説の勇者の伝説
8
壊れた魔術師の未来

「……私は……
この世界の運命と、
戦っています」
「女神の手下のぁんだが、
世界の運命と戦うって？」

誰かを殺しても、
なにも感じない化物。
誰かに愛されても、
それを感じられない化物。
「……まあ、
化物退治にいくんだ。
俺が化物になったところで、
悪いことはなにもないか」

Influence Map of Menoris

Anti-Roland Coalition = People's Republic of Sphelliyet

♦ Ferris Eris

Ryner's partner. A girl with unworldly beauty who's a master swordswoman. Her love for dango knows no bounds.

♦ Vois Fiurelle

Manipulating the coalition from the backstage, he was originally a leader of a swindler group.

♦ Kiefer Knolles

Originally a spy from a neighbouring country, she's in love with Ryner.

Demon King Ryner Lute

The king of the Anti-Roland Coalition = People's Republic of Sphelliyet. Was best friends with Sion.

Roland Empire

♦ Lucile Eris

The head of the < sword clan > that has protected Roland's king for generations. Ferris's older brother.

♦ Calne Kaiwal

Sion's ally from the previous Revolution, a Major General in the Roland army. Presently, he's a prisoner in the Remrus Empire.

♦ Milk Callaud

Captain of the "Taboo Breaker Pursuit Squad". Grew up in Roland's Special Institute #307 like Ryner.

Hero King Sion Astal

Putting an end to the tyrannical rule of the corrupt nobles, an illegitimate prince who started a revolution to take the throne. After unifying the southern continent, he now aims to advance into the central continent.

Other Powers

Azure Princess Mercenaries

♦ Pia Varliere

The queen of the Azure Princess Mercenaries, a bearer of a Congenital Magic Abnormality. Ryner's childhood friend.

Cursed Eyes Bearers

♦ Ene

"Torch Curse" bearer. The one who guides Tiir and the Cursed Eye bearers.

♦ Tiir Rumibul

As one who possess an "Iino Doue"that absorbs magic, now after Lieral's life.

Remrus Empire

♦ Remrus Remuld Aarqued

A mysterious man who rules over the Remrus Empire as a god's child. At war with Roland.

Unknown Affiliation

♦ Lieral Lieutolu

As Ryner's father, the Roland noble Duke Lieutolu. A magic scholar of the highest level.

Gastark Empire

♦ **Reeglewaz Pentest**

The commander of the Gastark Empire's army. Riphal's right-hand man.

♦ **Lir Orla, Kuu Orla, Sui Orla**

As spies from Gastark, the three of them are siblings. Each of them is in possession of "Rhule Fragmei".

Hero King Riphal Edea

Having gained control over the northern continent, the king of the Gastark Empire. He has a large sword that, by offering part of his body as compensation, can unleash large-scale destruction. Glouvil's wielder.

Prologue - The Promise Between The Two

From beyond the darkness, a voice was heard.

It was a familiar voice.

A pleasant, kind voice.

That voice spoke.

"... Hey, you awake?"

It was a voice that she was truly familiar with.

Her partner's voice.

The listless voice of a man as if he'd been asleep for a thousand years.

To that,

"... Mm,"

Groaning slightly, Ferris opened her eyes.

Before her, as she expected, was a man's face.

Ryner Lute's face.

He was waiting by Ferris's side.

"Did you sleep well?"

He said, smiling kindly.

Looking up at that kind face, Ferris asked,

"... Sleep? Who?"

"Ferris, obviously."

"Me?"

"Yeah."

"I was supposed to be waiting for you..."

"While waiting, you ended up collapsing."

"Is that right?"

"Yeah. That's what Toale said."

"I see."

"Yeah."

"... I see,"

Ferris said one more time, before looking around.

She saw that she was lying on top of a simple bed within a small tent.

Red light streamed in from the flaps, swaying gently.

The morning light shined on Ryner's kind, sleepy face.

It was incredibly quiet.

There was no sound of the wind.

The only thing that could be heard was that sound of her and Ryner's quiet breathing.

Looking at Ryner's kind face that was turned her way, she got up.

And she spoke.

"... Hmm. I wasn't really waiting for you."

Ryner laughed.

"You were definitely waiting just now..."

"You're wrong."

"Ahaha."

"I'm serious?"

"Yeah, sure. I know,"

Saying that, Ryner laughed again and then spoke.

"But, I worried you. Sorry."

"....."

"During the time when I was asleep... To be honest, I was just a bit conscious. So, I remembered the words you said..."

He began, but Ferris interrupted his words by swinging a fist up at his face.

And as she said something like *be quiet*, Ryner casually stopped her punch.

Even though he'd always be hit by her easily and be sent flying while shouting *gyaa*, he grabbed her arm with surprising force.

At that,

"... Uu,"

She groaned again.

While it didn't exactly hurt, she was confused as to why Ryner was grabbing her arm.

Alone in this crowded tent with Ryner holding onto her arm, her chest felt strange.

But she didn't understand why.

She didn't understand what was going on with her body.

The inside of her chest was pounding for no reason.

And there, with a kind face,

"I really worried you. Sorry,"

Ryner said.

Apparently not paying attention to the situation, he spoke gently.

To that,

"....."

Ferris shook off Ryner's arm a bit roughly, and,

"You didn't really,"

She said.

She averted her eyes from Ryner's face.

Already, she didn't understand what was happening to her, as her face became flushed, and so she averted her eyes.

Then,

"Oh, are you mad?"

As Ryner asked something like that, Ferris spoke.

"... I'm always mad at you."

"Ahaha. Then, is it because of my sleepiness?"

"It's because you've been a perverted sex fiend for a thousand years."

"Perverted sex fiend?"

"Correct. Night after night, you sneak into the tents of women and children to do as you please! However, your wicked ways end here. The beautiful girl angel Ferris-chan will deliver your punishment!"

She said, and in one movement, she readied her posture and launched a kick at Ryner that was twice as fast as before.

To that,

"Uowa, it'll hurt if you kick me that fast... Hold on,"

He said, lifting his right hand to block Ferris's kick; however, he didn't completely block it, and took a number of steps backwards.

Then while casually swinging the hand he used to block,

"Oooow~. Don't you think that hitting me seriously just now was too much?"

He said something like that, to which Ferris smiled faintly.

"I'm always serious when I hit you..."

However, while saying that, she stopped. She then looked at Ryner's arm.

His arm.

Even though it'd been torn to shreds by Lir's Lightning Beasts during the fight with Gastark, it'd been restored as if nothing had happened —staring at that,

"Your arm..."

She said, to which Ryner reacted.

After looking at his arm,

"Ah, this? Somehow, it was restored,"

He said something like that simply.

To that, Ferris asked,

"Restored?"

"Yeah. No, it's a long story... but, well, more importantly, there's something else I want to talk about. So can I ask you something?"

Ryner said that.

Ferris then asked,

"Something else?"

"Yeah. So, as repentance for abusing the guy who's supposed to be recuperating, could you just calm down and hear me out?"

"Calm down?"

"Yeah, yeah, calm down."

In response, Ferris nodded, and,

"Fine,"

She said, lowering herself onto the bed.

And like that, she sat down. Then, looking at Ryner standing inside

the tent and noticing that he wasn't making a move to sit down,

"You're not sitting too?"

She asked, to which Ryner laughed again.

"How thoughtful of you."

As he said something like that, Ferris nodded greatly as if it were obvious.

"I'm always thoughtful."

"Is that so?"

"It is."

"Then, since you've given me permission, I'll sit,"

Ryner said. Then, he approached her.

He sat down by Ferris's side.

As the bed wasn't very large, they were close to one another.

Their bodies almost touching, they were close.

At that,

"... Ah, ahh, hmm. Since I'm fairly awake, I'll stand,"

She said, standing up.

And for some reason, her chest hurt again. It hurt badly. Breathing was becoming difficult.

She looked at Ryner. With a tired-looking face, he smiled cheerfully at her.

Ferris narrowed her eyes at that.

He really was recuperating.

Of course.

It was only natural.

After that battle.

That battle where the unbelievable occurred, and this man, who was usually so unmotivated and acted as if he could sleep for a thousand years without caring, endured by himself like a fool.

This fool was so pointlessly kind that it hurt him, killed countless people to protect his friends, and despite that, smiled with a face like he was about to cry—

Ferris spoke.

"... Are you all right?"

Ryner replied,

"What?"

"No, that..."

"Are you worried?"

"Why would I be worried about you?"

"Haha."

"So, you're really all right?"

Ferris asked.

Then, she stared into his eyes.

Into his black eyes for which he was constantly abused as an **Alpha Stigma** monster and, each and every time, strained with sorrow as if he were about to cry, she stared.

On top of that, he killed others again. For the sake of protecting his friends, he killed an unbelievable number of people.

And as expected, he was troubled.

Because he was a fool. Because he was weak. Because he was kind. While laughing frivolously, he was always suffering.

At that,

"... You..."

Ferris said, but Ryner interrupted.

"Hey, Ferris,"

He said.

In response, she stopped her words.

"What is it?"

Again, Ryner smiled tiredly, and,

"Even if you don't comfort me, it's fine,"

He said.

"You've always been by my side, so already, I've been comforted enough,"

He suddenly said something like that.

"Thank you,"

Ryner gently gazed at her, saying that.

"....."

And regarding that, again Ferris's chest became uncomfortable and it became difficult to breathe.

"... What are you..."

Again, Ryner interrupted Ferris's words. For some reason, he stared at her with a somewhat solemn face, and,

"So could you listen to me just for a bit?"

"....."

"Ah~, um, what. Well, this might be kind of sudden."

"....."

"But, this is how I feel. So I'm going to say it plainly. See, the other day, when we almost died? There was something I wanted to tell you, but if I'd died before I could, I felt like that'd be pretty bad."

To those words, Ferris tilted her head.

"What was it?"

Ryner made a slightly nervous expression.

"No, uh, well."

"Hmm."

"I..."

"Uh-huh."

"I, you..."

"Hmm. Me, what?"

Ryner paused again. After turning his gaze away as if he were searching for the right words, he looked at her once more.

And then, he spoke.

"... Ah~, uh, I... I think I love you, Ferris."

This idiot said something like that.

Inside this crowded tent, gazing straight at her, Ryner said that.

"....."

That he loves me—he, who always looked sleepy, said that with a serious expression.

And in that moment,

"....."

As to be expected, it felt like something was tightening within her chest. As it beat violently enough that it felt like she was going to be sick, she wondered just what in the world was happening to her body. Thinking that, she became uneasy, as her chest hurt.

"....."

Staring at Ryner, Ferris spoke.

"... You're saying that you love me? That you love me as a woman?"

She asked that.

Ryner easily nodded.

"Yeah."

"I-In other words... that... you want to be in a relationship as a man and a woman with me—that's what you're saying?"

"No, I wouldn't have put it as directly as that... um, well, but that's the idea,"

Ryner said, his face awkward.

Ferris stared at him.

"....."

Wordlessly, she stared.

Ryner then looked up at her with a troubled face, and,

"... Ah, could it be that that's bad?"

"....."

"Uh, ah, no, if you're not interested in me at all, Ferris, then just forget about it. So, ah, this is awkward, huh? Was I a bit too forward?"

"....."

"But, um, since this is important, I wanted you to hear it. So, you... don't like me?"

Ryner said that.

And the answer to that question was no.

It wasn't that she disliked him.

If she disliked him, she wouldn't have left Roland and come to this place together with him.

He was her important partner, her idiot friend whom she stayed with, her manservant, her tea-drinking companion.

But.

"....."

There,

"... You don't see me as a man, then?"

Ryner asked such a thing.

In response, Ferris narrowed her eyes, troubled. She hadn't thought that way in the beginning.

Though she'd read about such things in magazines and novels, something like forming a relationship as a man and woman between herself and Ryner—she'd never seriously considered it.

In spite of that, this idiot before her suddenly said something like that.

Furthermore, to that.

"....."

To that, her chest was throbbing unnaturally.

If it was because she was bewildered or because of something else, she didn't know.

But she did understand what this throbbing was.

That her heart was beating more violently than usual, she understood.

Moreover, right now, something was off about the idiot Ryner before her—she thought.

This idiot wouldn't be able to so easily say that he loved someone.

If he really does love me, he's not the kind of person who could easily admit that.

That, she knew.

She'd been with that idiot for long enough now. As the two of them travelled the world, almost dying again and again, laughing, doing pointless things, she knew that this guy wasn't the kind of person who could easily say that he loved someone.

Besides, there was the timing of it—after killing so many people and continuing to blame himself like a fool, he wouldn't choose now of all times to say something like that.

And so, staring at the man before her eyes, Ferris spoke.

"... Who are you?"

"Eh? No, it's me, Ryner..."

"That's a lie."

"Wha..."

He began, but Ferris again interrupted him by swinging a fist at him. On top of that, she used all of her strength. She let loose a punch at this man before her—at Ryner, in order to kill him.

A sharp sound rang through the air as her fist moved to strike Ryner's neck. With that much force, Ryner would die.

And with that much speed, Ryner wouldn't be able to counteract. Unprepared as he was, he wouldn't be able to counteract to her speed.

That, Ferris knew. After all, she'd been fighting alongside him all this time. Ryner, who specialized in magic and wasn't prepared, wouldn't be able to react to her at full strength—that was what she expected.

"Like I said, that's dangerous!"

Ryner said, again fending off Ferris's attack. With the right hand that should've been missing, he grabbed Ferris's arm.

He grabbed it firmly.

But Ferris didn't stop. Shaking off that hand, she launched a kick.

"Stop,"

Ryner said.

And then, unable to see or grasp what was going on before her, Ferris's body stopped moving.

Glaring at Ryner,

"Ha—so your true character has appeared. Who the hell are you?"

She asked.

He who had Ryner's face then laughed with a sleepy expression that was just like Ryner's, and,

"How was I exposed?"

To that, Ferris replied,

"Because you're not Ryner."

"Oh, is that so? I thought my voice and face resembled his rather well, though."

"But you're not Ryner."

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

"I seeee. As I thought, you understand Ryner.. you understand my son quite well."

Saying something like that, he snapped his fingers. Suddenly, his face that'd looked just like Ryner's changed into that of a different person.

However, even so, it wasn't that great of a transformation.

First was his long hair.

The exact opposite of Ryner's black hair, it was blond.

With the same drowsiness as Ryner, though he was more fair-skinned, blue eyes.

He was still young. He seemed to be in his mid-twenties?

At any rate, he closely resembled Ryner. While the colour of his hair, eyes, and complexion were different, they had the same intelluctual and lazy air.

Staring at the blond-haired man who resembled Ryner, Ferris spoke.

"... Your son?"

The blond-haired man easily nodded.

"Correct."

"However—"

"Ah, by the way, before you say something like how I look too young to be the twenty-year-old Ryner's father~, I'm the same as your older brother, in that this isn't my true form... I can change however old I look. For example..."

He said, snapping his fingers again.

The man's face changed once more.

His figure changed into that of someone a bit past forty.

That aging man laughed cheerfully.

"You've met me like this once before. Though your memories of that have been sealed away... Anyhow, I'll remind you of that time."

Saying that, the man reached forward with his hand. He moved to touch Ferris's head.

To that, she—

"... The same as Brother...? What are you..."

However, before she could finish, the man touched her head.

In that instant.

Somehow, inside her head, there was a sound. As if something was being forcibly disconnected, there was a strange sensation.

And she remembered.

Suddenly, she remembered.

She remembered the memories she'd lost.

Memories of when she was still in Roland.

She remembered the time when an aging man had suddenly appeared before her, claiming to have killed Ryner.

At that time, she'd lost her composure and tried to attack the man. And unable to do anything, she was defeated.

He was a genuine monster.

Rendering her unable to lift her sword, without drawing a magic circle, and furthermore without using an incantation, he released magic.

Already, she was unable to do anything at all.

There was nothing Ferris could have done alone, without help.

But upon hearing that he killed Ryner, she'd lost her head and attacked him.

She knew that she didn't stand a chance against him, but even so, she'd rushed at him.

The result was that she'd been bounded, as her consciousness was stolen and her memories manipulated. She hadn't known why her memories disappeared.

Glaring at the man she'd met back then,

"... Who the hell are you?"

She asked.

Again, the aging man snapped his fingers. Once more, he returned to his young, twenty-something form.

He returned to the man with a sleepy face that resembled Ryner's.

And while laughing cheerfully with a face like Ryner's, the man spoke.

"Like I said, Ryner's father."

"... Ryner's father?"

"Yeah."

"Then, what would Ryner's father want with me?"

As she asked that, the man shrugged, and,

"I thought I would greet the girl who might become my son's future wife,"

He said those kinds of joking words.

Binding Ferris with some sort of unknown power, he laughed frivolously and said such a thing.

In response, Ferris glared at the man.

"Don't mess around with me..."

"I'm not really messing with you. Don't you love Ryner?"

"....."

"See, your face became red so quickly. On top of that, your heartbeat quickened considerably. Well, I say that, but part of the reason your heart's beating so violently is in response to the bit of magic that's tampering with it. Still..."

Saying that, the man laughed cheerfully. No, to say nothing of the kind smile he had on his face as he looked at her.

"Still, those are your true feelings. If you by any chance dislike Ryner, then you must hate him quite a lot. But when I asked you if you loved Ryner, your face became red. Your heartbeat quickened. Now, just what are the feelings whirling around inside of you..."

Over there,

"Be quiet,"

Ferris said.

But the man wouldn't be quiet.

"Just what are those feelings, hmm?"

"I said to be quiet."

"Even if I listen, that won't change the truth. You and Ryner..."

"Just shut up!"

Ferris shouted.

To that, the man smiled wryly, and then shrugged.

"Well, I don't know if they're necessarily romantic feelings. But there's no doubt that you love Ryner in some way."

As he said that, in that moment, Ferris felt something within her move.

When he said that she loved Ryner.

When he said that she loved that idiot, in that moment, she felt her chest throb painfully.

This is love? She asked herself that, but her body didn't know.

From the beginning, she didn't understand love and such things.

But.

"....."

She didn't dislike Ryner—that much was certain.

And that guy seemed to be ascertaining her feelings.

He seemed to be ascertaining that she loved Ryner.

However, for some reason,

"For what reason are you doing this?"

Ferris asked.

While frowning due to the pain in her chest, she asked that.

In response, the man snapped his fingers again.

In that moment, just as before, thanks to a power she couldn't see, her body was able to move again. Her body was free again.

But Ferris still didn't move. Even if she attacked him, she couldn't win.

That was why, glaring straight at the man,

"What in the world do you want?"

She asked, to which the man smiled with a sorrowful expression. With a face resembling Ryner but one that was even lonelier than his, he looked up at her.

"My son... Ryner—to protect him."

He said.

"Protect?"

"Yeah."

"What do you mean?"

Regarding that, the man spoke.

"Don't you know better than anyone by now how much of a coward he is?"

"....."

"So very lonely, crying if left alone, and only able to laugh without worry when with others. Then, he'd say it. *Because I'm a monster, it's all right for me to be alone. Because I don't want to hurt anyone, it's all right for me to be alone. As I'm a monster who shouldn't come into contact with others, it's all right,* he says over and over and over again."

"....."

At those words, Ferris almost cried. Somehow, it seemed like the man was using magic to greatly sway her feelings.

The man continued.

"But humans aren't beings who can live alone. To live without others around you, laughing together with you, is impossible. That's why I wanted to stay by his side, but... in this world, that wouldn't work out."

"....."

"That's why, all this time, I've been searching for my substitute—someone who would always stay by his side. Someone who would stay close with that crybaby, who would never betray him and always support him..."

To that,

"Then, I'm to fulfill that role?"

She asked.

The man replied,

"Yeah. You don't want to?"

"....."

She shook her head at that.

No, from the beginning, that had never been the case.

After all, she'd known from the start that that idiot was the sort who'd cry if left alone.

And she had also been lonely by herself, and so she stayed with him.

But now, already, it wasn't just her by Ryner's side. Already, there were numerous other people by his side.

Like that girl named Milk, from the **Taboo Breaker** Pursuit Squad.

And the red-haired girl who'd travelled the Menoris continent to solve the mystery of Ryner's **Alpha Stigma**.

And there was Sion.

"....."

Right now, he'd distanced himself far away from Ryner, but even so, he surely still cared for him.

That was why Ryner wasn't alone.

If Ryner cried, called out, and couldn't move, he was, without a doubt, not alone.

Despite that,

"... Why have you chosen me?"

Ferris asked.

That, she didn't understand.

That was why,

"Why are you trying to have me as your substitute?"

She asked that.

The man spoke.

"Because you won't betray Ryner."

"Won't betray?"

The man nodded at him.

Staring at the man's face that was so much like Ryner's, Ferris spoke.

"However, Sion..."

"He betrayed him, didn't he? No, you've already seen for yourself that he's no good, haven't you?"

"....."

The man spoke of such things.

Haven't you already seen for yourself that Sion's no good? He said something like that.

In response, Ferris stared intently at the man.

"You, about Sion..."

However, the man interrupted her and continued.

"I don't know. I don't know what will happen. Maybe Sion-kun will eventually return to his normal self. But right now, that's impossible."

"... So that's why you've chosen me?"

"Yeah."

"But there are still other choices. In spite of that, why have you chosen me?"

"Like Kiefer-chan?"

"... Right."

"She loves Ryner, doesn't she? If it were for my son's sake, she'd throw away her life."

At those words, for some reason her chest tightened painfully again, as Ferris frowned. She discreetly pressed back on her chest that was acting like that.

The man happily stared at that hand, and,

"Does it hurt?"

He asked such a thing.

"... What are you talking about?"

Ferris said while frowning.

The man spoke.

"That there's another girl who loves Ryner—does your chest hurt when you hear that?"

"....."

"Because your feelings are being amplified, your chest hurts. But you don't understand the reason behind that pain. How cuuute. You still don't understand your feelings at all."

"....."

"But it'd be nice if you could come to grasp your feelings as soon as possible. After all, a human's life can end before you know it... You should hurry and convey your feelings to your important people. Do it while you're both still alive."

After saying such things, Lieral smiled sadly. And like that, he looked outside the tent. To the darkness outside.

It was still nighttime.

After confirming the situation outside,

"Now then, let's move on from this digression. My time's almost up already, so let's get to the main issue at hand,"

He said.

At that, Ferris asked,

"Main issue?"

The man then stood up from the bed, and,

"Right,"

He said.

And he looked around, before confirming that the sword was placed in the corner of the tent.

Ferris's sword.

A large sword forged solely for the sword clan—the Eris family.

The man walked over to that sword and picked it up. He withdrew part of it out of its scabbard. Revealing the base of the blade—in that part, a seal had been applied.

A small paper-like object: a seal. The seal had a black design. A pattern of smiling eyes within a circle. A pattern of a small nose-like object, and a pattern of a, as expected, smiling mouth.

Ferris had guessed that seal to be something like the face of the Dango God and that she'd fainted upon receiving the seal on her sword, as the Dango God had sent her a message! She'd said to Ryner and Sion, making a fuss over it.

"... Back then, when I'd fainted, it was because you stole away my consciousness, wasn't it?"

The man shrugged in response.

"In other words, you're the one who put that seal there?"

The man looked her way, and,

"Yeah, that's right. The shape of the seal didn't matter, so don't you think it looks good? After all, when I asked, you said that you liked it."

To those words, Ferris, as expected, glared at the man and spoke.

"I don't remember you asking or me saying that?"

The man laughed.

"You wouldn't. Because the question was sent straight to your brain. And that you were pleased with the design was sent straight from

your brain. Furthermore, the place where your true feelings for Ryner entered, it was directly felt..."

"Be quiet,"

Ferris said.

The man became quiet, and then,

"Well, that's up to the person themselves to endure... It's fine. I'll be quiet."

"....."

"Now then, let's honestly go to the main issue at hand. Um, what was it?"

He said, to which Ferris, in a somewhat exasperated tone—

"Don't you know?"

She said.

"Doing whatever you want and appearing before someone who was sleeping."

The man laughed.

"Don't you also do whatever you want, breaking in and making a ruckus when Ryner's trying to sleep?"

"It's fine if it's me."

"Haha, your arrogance might be good for my son. I don't know about me, though."

"....."

"Buuut Ryner sure is popular, isn't he? With Ferris-chan, Kiefer-chan, and Milk-chan—with rather good children. As expected of my son. My~, it's hard to choose."

Glaring at Ryner's father who laughed while saying such things, Ferris spoke.

"Just hurry up and get to the point."

"Ah, right, I almost forgot. I'm really running out of time."

Saying that again, he looked outside the tent.

However, nothing was happening outside. Ferris couldn't feel any signs of movements in the air.

But it seemed that the man felt something that she couldn't. While paying attention to the outside of the tent, he spoke.

"Well, the main issue has exactly to do with what we were talking about before."

"What do you mean?"

"About you being my substitute. Not Kiefer-chan, not Milk-chan—you."

"Me?"

"Yeah."

"Why have you chosen me?"

She asked yet again.

"Because you're the sister of **God Devourer** [Lucile],"

Ryner's father answered.

Ferris narrowed her eyes at that.

"Because I'm Brother's sister?"

"Yeah."

"How is Brother connected with Ryner?"

The man laughed, and,

"I'm not telling you."

"Bastard..."

Ferris said, looking as if she were about to swing her sword; however, the man still smiled. He looked at her like her existence was even more trifling than an infant's.

That was why she didn't withdraw her sword.

After confirming that, the man smiled gently and spoke.

"I'm glad. After all, I truly don't want to waste any time on your pointless attacks."

To those words, Ferris asked,

"Before, you were paying attention to the outside of the tent—why is it that you don't have time?"

The man to that as well—

"I'm not telling you,"

He said.

At that, while getting irritated,

"In that case, what is that you want to talk to me about? I know that you placed the seal on my sword. But, have you come specifically to tell me that?"

She asked, to which the man replied,

"I've come to tell you the purpose of that seal."

"The seal's purpose?"

"Yeah. How to use that seal's power to protect my son..."

He began, but then suddenly, his words stopped. At the same time, a hole opened up in his right arm. As if a stake had been stabbed through his arm, there was a large hole that the man looked down at.

"Uh-oh, this really is bad,"

He said such a thing in his typical unconcerned, listless voice.

Regarding that,

"What in the world happened?"

Ferris asked, to which the man, as expected, while smiling frivolously—

"No, truth be told, I was devoured just now."

"Devoured?"

"Yeah."

"By whom?"

"By the pitiable puppet of the **Priests**... but, that's enough about that. More importantly, let's continue. It'd be bad if my entire body were devoured before I could finish, after all."

In response to those words, Ferris already had nothing to ask.

She couldn't understand most of what this guy was saying, so even if she were to ask something, he wouldn't give her a proper answer.

Furthermore, she wasn't able to beat him up and forcibly make him talk. At any rate, he was overwhelmingly strong.

She'd already reached the end of her patience. She'd reached the point where she just wanted to yell without even thinking. Perhaps that was also because of this guy's magic.

This irritated feeling was being unnaturally amplified.

The man noticed, and as he looked at her,

"Ah, before you yell out in anger, wait until I'm completely done,"

He said, laughing.

During that time, his body was steadily losing its shape. His right leg disappeared, his left shoulder disappeared, and yet the man was still smiling cheerfully.

While smiling, the man spoke.

"I want to ask two things of you."

"Two things?"

"Yeah."

"What are they?"

"The first is that you always stay by Ryner's side..."

However, Ferris interrupted that and spoke.

"So, that's already one thing?"

The man smiled.

"Yeah, even if I didn't ask you, you'd still stay with him. Isn't that right?"

"....."

"In that case, there's one more thing I want to ask of you. It's the main issue at hand."

"Then hurry up and talk."

"Yeah, I will,"

The man said. At the same time he said that, both of his arms disappeared. But, the man didn't pay that any heed. Instead, staring at the sword that she held,

"I've given that sword the same power that I gave your brother."

"The same power as Brother?"

"Yeah. In order to save you, your brother became **God Devourer** [Lucile], but..."

"Wha... Wait. What the hell are you talking about? Brother, for the sake of saving whom..."

She began, but the man didn't stop talking. As if he wasn't listening to her,

"But in order to save my son, you'll become **God Devourer** [Lucile]."

"Like I've been trying to ask, why are you saying Brother's name here..."

However, the man continued. Ignoring Ferris's words, he continued with what he was saying.

"For certain, there will be a time where Ryner can no longer withstand it. Because he's too kind, there will be a time where he can no longer move forward. So, when that time comes, I want you

to swing that sword. When he loses hope and is no longer able to move forward, I ask you now to save him... that you devour the **God** [Monster] within Ryner. The means of doing it is simple. Tear off the seal on this sword, and then cut at Ryner. This sword will devour the monster within Ryner. And that way, Ryner will be saved. However, you will be destroyed,"

The man said.

However, you will be destroyed, the man said simply.

In response, Ferris stared at the man, and,

"... Destroyed? In other words, you're saying that I'm to die for Ryner's sake?"

The man easily nodded again. And,

"You don't want to?"

He said something like that.

Regarding that, Ferris looked at her sword. With the seal mimicking the face of the Dango God placed on it, she looked at her sword.

This sword possessed the power to save Ryner. And if she were to use that power, she would die.

To that, she asked,

"... That Ryner would no longer be able to withstand it—would that be the fault of the power he used in that battle?"

"Yeah."

"Just what is it that's inside Ryner?"

"A demon."

"A demon?"

"Yeah. A lonely demon."

"That's..."

She began, but the man shook his head.

"There's no time to explain."

"... Is that so?"

"Yes. But already, I'm done with what I wanted to say. However you choose is fine. To use your life to save Ryner or to not save him... that's your..."

However, Ferris interrupted.

"It's not a problem. If that idiot loses hope and asks me to save him —I'll swing my sword,"

She easily said.

And to that, Ryner's father again smiled with a lonely expression.

"... My son truly is blessed. To be beloved by everyo..."

He began, but Ferris once more cut him off and spoke.

"But you're wrong about one thing. That idiot's a coward and a piece of trash who only ever wants to slack off and take afternoon naps, but he won't quit so easily,"

She said.

"So surely, I won't have to swing this sword. I don't know what will happen in the future, but if by any chance that guy loses hope, if he stops walking, I'll smack his rear end and forcibly drag him along. Without me having to swing my sword, he'll surely stand up again and keep walking,"

She said that.

The man—Ryner's father smiled, looking at her as if he wanted to say something,

"....."

But over there, he disappeared.

Devoured by something, his face vanished. Furthermore, the remainder of his body steadily disappeared, until there was nothing left before her.

Looking around to confirm that there was nobody else in the tent—

"....."

However, in there, she awakened.

Rather than in a tent, she awakened in a small carriage.

Then, she remembered. Having fallen asleep while nursing the still-asleep Ryner, she'd taken a nap.

In other words,

"... That was all just a dream?"

She murmured.

But suddenly, outside the carriage, she heard a scream.

The voice of a man, as if his throat had been torn to shreds.

"....."

Ryner's scream.

She moved to grab her sword by her side and jump out of the carriage.

And then she noticed.

Something when she withdrew part of her sword from its scabbard.

And she looked at the seal with the Dango God's face drawn on it.

She looked at the seal that Ryner's father had placed.

"... Or maybe it wasn't a dream?"

She didn't know anymore.

Whether it was a dream or whether it was reality, she didn't know right now.

However, the fact that Ryner was screaming in what could only be a plea for help was, without a doubt, reality.

That was why she grabbed her sword with the seal, and,

"....."

She leapt outside the carriage.

Chapter 1: The Wound Of The Cross

It was always like this, Ryner thought.

It was always like this for him, he thought.

Just when he'd finally met his father again.

Right when he was finally able to meet the father that he'd forgotten all this time, the worst scene developed before his eyes.

"....."

Before his eyes, a monster came to devour and kill his father.

A monster like him who possessed cursed eyes—

With black eyes in which a glowing red cross appeared, called the **Iino Doue**, a monster used those eyes to devour and kill his father.

And his father was no longer moving.

That monster—the monster named Tiir Rumibul gouged out his father's heart and absorbed it through those eyes.

And his father was no longer moving.

Fallen to the ground, his father was still.

"....."

Ryner couldn't do anything about it.

It happened so quickly that he couldn't do anything.

Nevertheless, he stared down at his father's motionless body.

No, on the contrary, he looked at the father he'd lost so quickly, absorbed by Tiir's eyes.

"....."

He screamed.

He let out a scream that tore through his throat, before swinging a fist.

He swung his fist, using the right arm he'd received from his father, at Tiir's face.

However, it didn't connect.

As Tiir had devoured his father's magic and, furthermore, his body, his power had been enhanced and so his movements were too quick for Ryner to follow.

At the same time, Tiir's arm reached out in his direction and grabbed his neck with unbelievable strength. Applying enough pressure that it seemed like he could tear off his neck,

"... Calm down, Ryner,"

Tiir said something like that.

But Ryner didn't stop. After seeing what had just happened, he didn't care if he ended up breaking his neck in the process, and so continued to struggle.

"Damn it,"

Tiir said, groaning.

And he let go. So that Ryner wouldn't die. So that his neck wouldn't be broken, Tiir let go of him and took a step back. Like that, Tiir moved away from Ryner's collapsed father.

To that,

"Dad!"

Ryner said, before moving to lift his fallen father up.

Tiir spoke.

"Wait, Ryner! I haven't killed him yet! Don't approach that monster!"

He exclaimed in a frantic voice, to which Ryner glared at Tiir and,

"That monster... The monster here is you!"

He shouted.

He called Tiir a monster.

And at that, for a moment, Tiir's expression became clouded.

But Ryner didn't care about that.

Avoiding Tiir's pursuit, he stood over his father as if to guard him, and as he did so,

"... Dad!"

He called out one more time.

But there was no reply.

However, he desperately continued,

"... Hey, this is a joke, right? You're stronger than this, right? Aren't you a genius at magic? Then, then this kind of thing..."

Interrupting those words,

"No, he'll die here,"

Tiir said.

And then he moved.

As expected, Ryner's eyes weren't able to follow Tiir's movements.

But in response, Ryner changed the purpose of his eyes. Rising in the center of his eyes was a glowing, iridescent pattern that traced the coil of magic within Tiir's body.

The eyes that were supplying Tiir's body with magical power, significantly boosting his physical capabilities—he grasped it.

Tiir was behind him, moving to devour his father's body.

Red crosses blazing, he opened his mouth wide.

And to that,

"Like I'd let you!"

He shouted. He turned around. However, he wasn't capable of

stopping Tiir's movements. His strong suit was magic, but even aside from the fact that that guy's **Iino Doue** would absorb it, he didn't even have time cast a spell.

And so,

"....."

Ryner used his body as a shield to defend against Tiir's attack. If Tiir wanted to attack, he'd have to get through him—

However, there,

"Nnn—"

There was a familiar woman's voice close to his ear.

Suddenly, a blonde woman appeared before him.

It was Ferris.

She swung her sword down at Tiir.

In that instant, a high-pitched metallic sound rang out. Ferris's sword had hit Tiir's mouth.

However, Tiir's mouth easily stopped the attack there.

"....."

No, in reality, Tiir's mouth had been cut by Ferris's sword; however, it immediately healed.

Having devoured his father's magic, Tiir's regenerative abilities were abnormally powerful, so perhaps there was nothing that could harm him.

Looking at that, Ryner thought.

This is bad, he thought.

Right now, right here, how to stop Tiir—he couldn't think of anything.

Nevertheless, he readied his posture—

Tiir spoke.

Furthermore, Ferris also spoke.

On top of that, the father he'd thought to be dead up until then, at the same time,

"*Idiot, do you intend to die!?*"

They all shouted at him.

"Eh?"

In response to being yelled at by everyone at once, he accidentally let his voice slip.

Moreover, Tiir scowled.

"Damn it, as I thought, he didn't die..."

He swung a fist at his father, which the latter, previously exhausted, grinned at, and,

"**Iino Doue** bearers are certainly my natural enemies, but... if you alone could kill me, would the **Priests** need to create so many of you?"

He said that kind of thing.

And then his father disappeared.

Then, a short distance away, he reappeared.

Dusting dirt off of his clothes, he picked up his fallen briefcase.

Already, by that point, the hole that Tiir had left when he'd thrust through his chest and the missing arm he'd given to Ryner had been restored.

Regarding that, Tiir spoke.

"... Monster."

His father—Lieral Lieutolu—smiled and replied.

"I won't deny that."

"I'll kill you."

"That's impossible for you alone. Shouldn't your leader... that **Torch**

Curse girl already understand that?"

"....."

"Hit it right on the head, did I? Then was your aim to prevent me and Ryner from making contact?"

However, over there, Tiir spoke. Sharply narrowing his eyes in which the red cross floated,

"... No, you're to die here."

Lieral shrugged.

"That, I understand."

At that,

"Hey, Dad!"

Ryner said, to which Lieral looked at him kindly.

"You don't understand what's going on?"

He said what was on Ryner's mind, at which Ryner nodded, fed up.

"Geez, how am I supposed to understand!? You died in front of me and then came back to life—I thought I was gonna have a heart attack."

"Ahaha. Ryner loves me..."

"Just die!"

Ryner groaned, to which Lieral laughed again. Then, looking at him with a slightly somber expression,

"... But you shouldn't be so emotional over my death and resurrection. After all, my life is almost over. After all, she... Iruna died just now..."

His words stopped there.

And with a smiling and yet somewhat sad face,

"No, well, that's enough. Now then, moving on, shall we wrap things up here?"

He said.

Then staring at Tiir,

"**Iino Doue** bearer. For what purpose did you come here?"

He asked.

Tiir looked as if he were going to answer.

"....."

But over there, Lieral stamped his foot.

And he said one word.

"CHIGASHIRA,"

He murmured.

That was a spell from Roland.

However, Lieral didn't recite the incantation.

He didn't draw the magic circle.

Nevertheless, even though he only said one word, the magic activated.

Ryner's eyes looked at that structure. Looking at it, it wasn't something he could imitate at all.

Those complicated magic equations coiled around the inside of Tiir's body.

And then, **Chigashira** easily activated.

It activated behind Tiir.

Tiir immediately reacted, but it was a second too late. Stakes rose from the ground, as **Chigashira** pierced Tiir from behind.

"Gah..."

Tiir moaned, as he tried to remove himself from the stakes. But Lieral stamped his foot a few more times. More stakes appeared, as they stabbed through Tiir's entire body.

"....."

The wounds instantly healed. Using the magic he'd devoured from Lieral, the wounds instantly healed.

But, it seemed he'd reached his limit.

Ryner could see that the magic within Tiir was being drained away.

At that, Lieral laughed.

"If **Chigashira** is activated from the ground, you can't devour it, it seems? Nooow then, shall we see how long your regenerative abilities will last~?"

He said, to which Ryner spoke.

"Hey, Dad, don't tell me you plan on killing him..."

Lieral shook his head at that.

"Not at all. He's a necessary person with his capabilities, after all. However, it's best to weaken him so that he can't follow me..."

Saying that, he stamped his foot against the ground once more.

From behind, another stake flew at Tiir, which he somehow evaded.

And then after lowering his body, he lunged at Lieral.

But in response, Lieral laughed.

"Haha, you can't win. You don't have any power left, do you? Your advantage was that you'd devoured the **Sleepiness Cloud** that I'd unwittingly created. But that power is already no more."

He said that and then took a step forward.

Upon that, Tiir scowled and took a step back.

At that,

"See now?"

Lieral said and laughed again.

Tiir glared at that face, looking increasingly annoyed.

"... I understand that much. I can't win this anymore."

"How honest of you."

"But don't get any closer to Ryner. You'll drive him mad. I've been given orders to..."

"Protect him from me?"

"Correct."

"You've got it all wrong, you know. I love Ryner."

"That's the worst quality."

"Haha."

"For certain, to Ryner, you'll..."

He began, but then Lieral spoke.

"But that's enough. What I wanted has already been completed. While you were frantically trying to attack me, everything was completed. I—I've already found my substitute,"

He said, laughing.

Then Lieral looked over in Ryner's direction.

No, rather, for some reason, he looked over at Ferris, who was by Ryner's side.

Regarding that,

"... Ryner,"

Ferris said.

He looked at her while she asked,

"What's going on here?"

However, Ryner didn't answer her question.

Or rather, he had no idea why Tiir had chosen now to appear or even why he'd then attacked Lieral.

But then Ferris,

"So, that blond-haired man is your father?"

She asked that sort of thing, to which Ryner looked at her with some surprise.

"How'd you know?"

"Didn't you call him 'Dad' just a while ago?"

"Ah~"

"Furthermore, he has the same listless, half-asleep air as you, doesn't he?"

"Eh~, is it really like that? He and I are alike?"

Ferris nodded.

"You're alike."

"Heh."

"However, it seems that he's far stronger than you."

"... Seems like it, yeah. Apparently, he's some kind of magic genius?"

"Hum. Well, you're still undefeated as the pervert master."

"You're *still* saying that kind of thing..."

Ryner said, looking at her with an astounded expression.

However, thanks to that pointless conversation with her, he'd calmed down a bit and began to think over the situation.

Well, even if he thought over the situation, he still had no idea why Tiir attacked Lieral.

However, for whatever reason, it felt like neither Lieral nor Tiir was Ryner's enemy. It seemed that they were both fighting to help him.

"Geez, it sure is troubling to be so popular,"

He said while smiling ruefully.

However he looked at it, the worst of the situation had passed. Tiir no longer had the power to kill Lieral. Ryner could see that with his eyes of the **Solver of All Equations**.

And it didn't seem like Lieral intended to do anything to Tiir.

In that case, it seemed that this fight was over.

That's why Ryner once more wondered, *What the hell is going on here*? That was what whirled around inside his head.

However, in front of him, Lieral spoke.

He suddenly turned around, and,

"... What's this—it seems that something's coming from behind... Could it be that more **Iino Doue** bearers are coming here? So you

weren't alone?"

He said.

In response, Tiir groaned.

"Damn it, exposed faster than I thought..."

And again he lowered his body.

At that, Lieral,

"Behind are two people. And from the right there's also someone with the **Will Heim**. I see. You're serious about killing me here. Then, you were the decoy to let your friends prepare,"

He said that sort of thing; however, in spite of that, he didn't seem tense at all.

Regarding that,

"... Hey, Dad, it'll be bad if you don't escape before Tiir's friends..."

Ryner tried to say, but Lieral interrupted.

And,

"I see. The **Torch Curse** girl truly foresaw my death. She saw that I would die here, then."

In response, a smile arose in Tiir's face.

"That's what I've been saying from the beginning."

"You'll kill me here?"

"That's correct."

"The Cursed Eye bearers who were born to kill me all gathered here for the sake of accomplishing that?"

"That's correct,"

Tiir said, nodding.

And to that, Lieral made a troubled face as he directed his gaze towards the sky.

"And you're saying that this scene—this was seen by that **Torch Curse** girl?"

He said, muttering it as if expecting somone to hear his question.

But there was no answer.

No response came down from the sky.

At that,

"Some~how, there are a lot of things strange about this... that **Torch Curse** girl kills me? For what reason? Why in the world was that seen by her... no, well, it's fine. I'll have to meet with her in person,"

He said, before moving.

He took a step forward.

Then his figure disappeared. At the very least, his movements couldn't be seen by Ryner.

And then in the next instant, he was standing behind Tiir. Only Ferris was able to react.

"Ryner,"

She urged, upon locating Lieral's figure.

From behind, he grabbed the collar of Tiir's neck.

To that, Tiir, in a panic, tried to look over his shoulder.

"Don't move or I'll kill you."

"Then go ahead and kill me."

"Ah, geez, you certainly are troublesome,"

Lieral said while letting go of Tiir. Then, he kicked his back.

And,

"Ryner,"

He called out his name, looking over at him.

Then, while looking at him, he smiled, and,

"You should come home sometime."

He said something like that, to which Ryner asked,

"To where?"

"Well, where, I wonder."

Then, Tiir swung his fist while speaking.

"Are you trying to escape?"

Lieral laughed.

"I'm escaping. You see, you made a mistake. You Cursed Eye bearers gathered here to kill me, correct? Then, the number of guards protecting the **Torch Curse** girl has decreased, hasn't it? My, my, this is bad. Your precious leader's life is in danger—"

There, Tiir shouted,

"Damn you!"

He swung his fist up at him. However, as expected, it didn't connect.

While laughing,

"Now then, now then, where she did arrive before? I'd best kill her before you return..."

Lieral said, as he suddenly fell back. Jumping back, his figure warped, and in the next instant, he moved back a great distance in one go.

Staring at that,

"Hey, are you really going?"

Ryner asked, to which Lieral nodded.

"Sorry. But we'll meet again."

"When?"

"Soon?"

"Like I said, when exactly?"

However, over there, Tiir called out.

"Kepel! Fire magic at me!"

As if in response to those words, a sash of light was released from somewhere and moved to strike Tiir.

However, Tiir devoured it.

Opening his eyes wide, he devoured the sash of light.

In that moment, magic power flowed through Tiir's body. As his entire body was supplied with that power,

"I'll kill you!"

He said, as his body's acceleration burst. In one movement, he erased the distance between him and Lieral.

But while looking at him with a calm expression,

"... If I take care of you again, you'll bounce back immediately,"

Ryner's father said.

Tiir was just before him.

However, his father held out his briefcase. He opened it. Papers spilled forth from within, moving to swallow up him and Tiir.

However, his father was no longer there.

It seemed that he'd disappeared within that cloud.

On top of that, the structure for how he'd disappeared wasn't visible to Ryner's eyes.

Honestly, it seemed that his father had stopped being human.

His body already wasn't that of a human's.

That was how he was able to so easily disappear.

That was how he had unbelievable power that exceeded that of a human's.

Naturally, he'd had to pay some sort of price. What that was, Ryner wasn't able to see.

"....."

However, at any rate, it seemed that this fight was over.

Ryner looked at Tiir, who'd missed the one he was to devour. Staring at the black-clothed Cursed Eye bearer who stood there, dumbfounded,

"Looks like it's already over, huh?"

He asked, but Tiir didn't turn around.

Regarding that, Ryner shrugged, before looking around. He could see people like Tiir—men with black hair and wearing black robes who'd gathered here at some point.

They were clearly all Cursed Eye bearers.

Two of them had the **Iino Doue**. One of them had eyes with abilities that Ryner hadn't seen before.

They gathered around Tiir.

"Did you kill him?"

They asked, to which Tiir shook his head and spoke.

"No."

"Then he escaped?"

"Yes."

"But the leader said to kill that monster here..."

"The future changed. Don't you understand that as well?"

"However—"

"The situation's become problematic. To Ene, that man..."

"Her whereabouts were exposed!?"

Tiir shook his head again, and,

"I don't know. But if it's him... In any case, we should return as well. We need to receive Ene's instructions again."

Then he turned around.

Staring at Ryner,

"Ryner,"

Tiir called, to which he responded.

"What is it?"

"Won't you come with us?"

At that, Ryner smiled and answered,

"I don't get what's going on at all, so no way."

Tiir smiled as well.

"Isn't that right? I didn't think our reunion would go so poorly..."

"If you think that was bad, then you should've done a proper greeting first,"

Ryner said, at which Tiir made a slightly troubled face.

"No, there wasn't quite the time for that. I'll explain on the way back. Come with us,"

He said, holding out his hand.

Ryner stared at that, before immediately turning to his partner.

"Well, what do you think?"

To that,

"You don't know?"

Ferris said.

He nodded as well.

"Something like that. At least, I have no clue what just happened here."

"That's because you're an idiot who doesn't understand anything."

"Is that right?"

"It's the truth."

"Well, I guess it's true that I really don't know what happened here..."

Ryner said, staring at Tiir as he contemplated.

Judging by pieces of Lieral and Tiir's conversation, it seemed that Tiir had come here to prevent Lieral and Ryner from making contact.

However, Ryner didn't understand his motivations behind that at all.

Tiir had said something at that time.

"You've been deceived. That's not your father, Ryner."

Furthermore, he'd said something else.

"My leader said that he's the greatest threat... that he's gone mad, more so than anyone else. So if he isn't killed... If he isn't killed right now, our important Ryner will be lured away."

Of course, Ryner had also noticed a few things vaguely off about his father.

No, rather than vaguely, from start to finish, he hadn't seemed human at all. Somehow, his entire body was composed of magic, and he hadn't died even after losing his heart.

But he didn't look like he'd gone mad.

At the very least, he didn't look like the mad monster Tiir spoke of.

I mean, for some reason, Lieral—Dad expressly came to save me.

He expressly came to tell the me who's killed so many and even killed Mom that he loved me.

He insistently told me things like how I was loved when I was born.

But Tiir came to kill that father.

And something like "*So that our important Ryner won't be lured away, I have to kill him right now.*"

So that he wouldn't be lured away.

So that he wouldn't be lured away by Lieral.

"....."

Of course, he was taken in by his father's words. Each word from him broke down the wall around his heart.

Him, who'd believed himself to be a cursed monster beloved by no one.

To him, who'd believed himself to be a monster who could only hurt others, he'd said such things—

"Seriously, since I was such a hesitant and troubled guy..."

He muttered under his breath.

Well, after suddenly being told he was loved like that, it was difficult to properly grasp matters.

But that's why, for sure, if Dad—if the man calling himself Lieral was an imposter and came here to lure me away with kind words, I'd say he succeeded, he thought.

If that man calling himself his father was an imposter—for example, if he was a monster born as part of the **Goddesses**, who'd appeared in the war against Gastark, in order to deceive Ryner.

"... Hold on, I haven't been hurt, have I?"

Ryner muttered, groaning slightly.

After all, his heart had already been swayed.

Being told that he was loved when he was born and how it was okay for him to have been born swayed a bit of his heart, again breaking down part of the wall that stretched around it.

But still, the idea that Dad was an imposter—it's possible, he thought.

After all, the **Goddesses** hated the **Demon**.

After all, the **Goddesses** hated Ryner.

Why did they hate him? Why the **Goddesses** and whatnot existed, etc., he didn't know yet.

When he'd taken in the **Lonesome Demon**'s power, he'd gotten a hold of some information, regarding how the demon wanted to save the **Hero**—that was all he knew.

But the **Goddesses** hated the **Demon**.

That was because the **Demon** wanted to kill all of the **Goddesses**.

To save the **Hero**, he would kill the **Goddesses**.

To save the **Hero**, he would kill the **Goddesses**.

To save the **Hero**, he would kill the **Goddesses**.

The demon that resided within Ryner's mind continuously muttered that.

So he'd understood immediately that part of the **Goddesses** had appeared and attacked, sending an assassin after him.

He'd noticed immediately that they wanted to kill him. They, from over there, came to kill him.

And if that was the case Lieral as well—if the man calling himself his father was a monster created by the Goddesses—then Tiir's actions made sense.

Otherwise, it was possible that Tiir had other reasons for wanting his father dead.

"... Well then, this is troubling. Seriously. Who the hell is the enemy?"

Ryner muttered.

He already understood that Tiir wasn't the enemy. After all, Ryner

knew that Tiir was the same as him, as a Cursed Eye bearer who'd been persecuted by humans, who carried the same sorrow.

However, if Tiir wasn't the enemy, did that mean that his father was a lie after all?

Or if that wasn't it, then had something gone astray?

"....."

Ryner stared at Tiir.

Tiir, holding his hand out—

"Now, hurry and come with us,"

He said one more time, and then,

"Or else we'll force you to?"

He said that sort of thing.

However, Ryner shrugged, and,

"You'll force me to?"

He asked, at which Tiir smiled faintly.

"For disobedient children, we've learned to rely on force to take them along."

Ryner laughed at those words as well.

"Oh, oh, how scary~. But I have allies everywhere here... do you really think you can take me along by force so easily?"

"I think so, yes."

"Ehhh, you're pretty confident in yourself."

"Of course. You already understand, don't you, Ryner? Compared to humans, we who possess God's Eyes..."

Ryner interrupted him and spoke.

"But these humans have been persecuting us all this time, haven't they? When it comes to how dangerous humans can be... Don't we Cursed Eye bearers know best?"

"....."

Tiir became quiet at that. As he narrowed his eyes, the cross within them began to glow a bright red.

Naturally, he intended to take Ryner along by force.

But Ryner smiled cheerfully, and,

"Well, just hold on for a bit. I'll decide for myself whether to go with you or not."

As expected, Tiir looked troubled at that.

"But—"

He said, to which Ryner shook his head.

"You don't need to explain. Besides, your explanation would only cover whatever benefits your situation, right? Likewise, if Dad were here to explain, he'd only cover what benefits his situation. In that case, I'll decide for myself what to believe,"

He said.

Tiir stared at him; however, he lowered his hand that he was holding out.

And his expression became slightly uneasy.

That guy hated humans and was completely self-assured in that, but he was kind to Cursed Eye bearers.

That, Ryner had already seen many times.

People from Gastark had killed the Cursed Eye bearers Lafra and Pueka, who were dear to Tiir.

Thus, Tiir was likely being sincere.

That he came here to save Ryner—he was saying that from the bottom of his heart.

However, what Tiir believed and the truth were two different things. No, from the beginning, he wasn't sure of what the truth was.

In that case, how should he move forward?

Ryner asked himself that.

And then,

"... Hey, Ferris."

He said, again speaking to his partner beside him.

He spoke to the ever-reliable and violent woman.

She turned to him with her eternally emotionless face.

"What is it?"

To that, Ryner asked,

"Um, I want to ask you something again."

"Hmm."

"Before, how did you know that that blond-haired man was my dad?"

Ferris looked at him with a curious expression.

"You haven't noticed yet?"

He said, to which Ryner smiled, and,

"Just answer the question. How did you know that Lieral—that blond-haired man was my dad?"

Ferris answered,

"His face was..."

"... Like mine?"

"Right."

"But don't you think that's weird? Looking at that guy, he was clearly only in his twenties, right? More specifically... even if I called him my dad, there's no way you'd think that by looking at him."

However, as expected, she easily responded to that question.

"That's simple. In other words, you're the pervert family who, for the last eight years, to married girls..."

"Hey, okay, okay... that's enough already... so? Why do you know the truth? Have you met with that guy before?"

He asked, looking at her as she returned his gaze, before she said something strange.

"Hmm. No, he appeared in my dreams before."

"Haa? A dream?"

"Yeah. As a pervert like you, that blond-haired man forcibly entered my dreams to deliver a message."

"A message?"

"Mmm."

"He specifically entered your dreams to give you a message?"

"That's right. He's quite the nuisance."

"Ehh... so Dad... um, ah, no, that blond-haired man came to you?"

He asked.

At that, a faint smile appeared in Ferris's expressionless face as she spoke.

"He told me about how you were a crybaby."

"Ah? What's with that?"

"Furthermore, that you were an idiot and garbage and thick-headed."

Ryner looked at Ferris with half-closed eyes, and,

"You're lying, aren't you?"

He said, to which Ferris—

"Of course,"

She said.

Ryner smiled at that.

"So I'm a huge idiot, huh?"

"Always."

"No, well, even if I'm always one... uh, then, well, that's true."

"So you're saying that it's the truth."

"Ri~ght... Well, that's enough. So, leaving that aside as the truth—well?"

Ryner asked.

"What was the message?"

In response, Ferris said,

"Just that."

"Haa? So you're seriously saying that he entered your dreams just to say *that* and then left?"

"Mm-hmm."

"Liaaar."

Ferris shrugged, and,

"Well, in the end, since you're a piece of trash who'll cry if left alone, I have to stay by your side—he told me that as well."

"....."

"He asked that I would stay by your side,"

She said that.

To that,

"... Heh,"

Ryner said.

Then, staring at her,

"... So how did you reply to that?"

He asked.

And in the moment he asked that, he regretted it. After all, there was no need to ask such a question.

But she looked up at him. Staring at him with her usual emotionless face,

"Do you want to hear?"

She said.

At that, Ryner smiled wryly, and,

"No, no. Forget about it,"

He said, shaking his head.

After all, he didn't really need to hear it.

After all, he could already take a guess as to what her reply was.

Her reply was clear by the fact that she'd come here.

At any rate, Ryner was an **Alpha Stigma** monster. He was a monster who could go berserk at any moment and kill everyone around him.

On top of that, he'd already tried to kill her once.

As an **Alpha Stigma** bearer who'd gone berserk, he'd tried to kill her.

In spite of that, she always stayed by his side.

Always staying next to him and swinging her sword and beating him up.

"....."

No, it wasn't just her.

There were all of his friends here.

Even though their chances of winning the war against Gastark were almost non-existent, Kiefer, Toale, and Iris and co. were idiots who came with him to this battlefield.

They believed in a monster like him who didn't know how to help, and leapt right into the battlefield with him.

After that much, the answer is already clear, Ryner thought.

No matter how much I run, I don't want to be alone anymore, Ryner thought.

He wasn't sure when exactly this kind of troubling thing, being surrounded by friends, had happened.

He could no longer cry and call out in loneliness or try to run away, what with all these friends here.

And he wanted to help his friends—that was what he thought.

If his power could be of any use to them.

Continuing to be abused as a monster, cursed for his eyes—nevertheless, for Ferris's sake, for Sion's sake, for his friends' sakes, he wanted to be of use to his friends. That was why he was born into this world, he now thought.

And so Ryner spoke.

After looking at Ferris with a faint smile, his expression changed into a wider one as he spoke to Tiir.

"... As I figured, I'm not going with you guys. My friends are right here."

Then to that, Tiir said,

"You've been decei..."

"I haven't been deceived. Or if I have, it's fine. I've decided for myself that I like living like this. Being deceived isn't hurting me,"

Ryner said.

In response, Tiir stared at him with a pitying and sad expression.

"... **Alpha Stigma** bearers are always like that. Because of that kindness, humans betray them and they lose control."

However, to that, Ryner shrugged.

"I don't possess the **Alpha Stigma** anymore."

"But you'll still be betrayed."

"That's why it's good to be different."

"... Don't overlook things."

Ryner smiled at Tiir's words, and,

"If that's the case, then let's do this together. That's what Lafra entrusted me with. So..."

And so, he held out his hand.

The same way Sion did for him.

The same way Ferris did for him.

The same way Kiefer, Milk, Toale, and his friends did for a dangerous monster like him, Ryner did for Tiir.

Holding his hand out towards the heart of the wounded Cursed Eye bearer, Ryner spoke.

"Become our ally. If you can come to think the same way I do, then you should become the ally of those I care about,"

He said that.

Tiir stared at him with a surprised expression.

"... What are you talking about, Ryner? Us, allies with humans? That's impossible. You should know that very well..."

Interrupting him, Ryner spoke.

"You don't know until you've tried."

"I *know*."

"No, you don't. Rather, up until now, I hadn't done anything either. In reality, I was lonely, hurting, and running away from everything. But that was no good. The more I tried to run away, the more hurt I became. So, already—if you can't endure it, then shouldn't you stop trying to run? Really, you as well..."

However, at that moment, Tiir's expression changed. Glaring at him —

"... I what?"

"....."

"You couldn't be suggesting that I desire to be with humans, could you?"

"At the very least, you desire coexistence..."

However, Tiir laughed. Looking at Ryner as if he were a fool, he laughed, and,

"Ha, haha, what are you talking about? Humans have rejected coexistence. Don't you remember how Lafra was killed? Pueka? They wanted to believe in being kind to humans. They wanted to believe in being kind. And in the end, what happened to them? Who it was that killed them?"

"That's..."

"Two people who were still children? No, **Alpha Stigma** bearers are always killed as children. Without knowing anything, they're killed. So, Ryner. Do you know? Do you even know exactly how many of our friends they've killed?"

"That, I..."

"You know and you say to coexist with humans? They who laugh as they kill us—you're saying to coexist with those unsightly humans?"

To that question,

"At least with my friends..."

Ryner tried to say, but stopped.

After all, those words wouldn't reach Tiir. With the wall that lay around his heart, firmly in place, those words wouldn't reach him. He was the same as him. Running away from everything, he was the same as him.

That was why Ryner stopped his words.

And how he could reach Tiir's heart, he wondered. How he could get him to have faith, he wondered.

In a troubled voice,

"... It appears that you've already been misled by Lieral Lieutolu's words,"

Tiir said that sort of thing.

"Well then, what should we do now? How can we take you along..."

Ryner frowned at Tiir, and,

"Sorry. I'm not going with you,"

He said.

To that, Tiir narrowed his eyes in sadness.

"No matter what?"

"Yeah."

"You believe in the words of that monster—Lieral Lieutolu—more than mine?"

Ryner shook his head at that.

"No,"

He replied.

And thinking of Lieral's—of Dad's—kind expression, he spoke.

"Back then, whether or not that blond-haired man was really my dad, I still don't know."

Tiir, with a slightly troubled expression, stared his way.

"Then why?"

Ryner answered that.

"That's not the point here. I believe in something different. I believe that we can stay by the side of humans..."

However, interrupting him, Tiir spoke.

"The idea makes me sick."

"Is that so? But isn't good to be surprised once in a while?"

"That's all fake."

"If that's the case, then fine. I'm happy here,"

Ryner said.

Then, looking at Ferris,

"This person is a close friend of mine, in addition to my other friends. And yet I'm still fine,"

He said that.

In response, Tiir, as expected, looked at him with a sad expression.

"....."

Silently, he stared at him.

Slowly, Tiir's surroundings became noisy. People started to awaken. As the **Sleepiness Spell** cloud that Lieral had cast disappeared, people started to awaken.

And so the each of the other Cursed Eye bearers spoke.

"... Hey, Tiir, what are we going to do?"

"We should leave this place before the humans wake up."

"Just take him along by force. We can talk on the way there."

"Ene's worried. We don't have any more time to waste here."

They said those kinds of things.

Nevertheless, Tiir said nothing and silently stared at Ryner.

With his cursed eyes.

With that red cross, he stared at Ryner.

"....."

Then, he turned around.

And,

"... I understand. Let's go back."

He started to walk.

He was going to leave.

Ryner didn't know what he could do. He didn't have the words needed to open Tiir's heart.

Nevertheless,

"Hey, Tiir,"

Ryner said.

Tiir didn't turn around.

However, Ryner decided to continue.

"Ahh~, um, I know that at this point, you can't believe in humans, but... but, well, it's like this. We can change humans, don't you think? We Cursed Eye bearers... well, not **Cursed Eyes**, but as you call them, **God's Eyes**. If, uh, we can be not discriminated against for these **God's Eyes**—shouldn't we try for that?"

"....."

"I'm not saying that we can change the entire world. But at the very least, we can be by the side of the humans who don't fear us. To not be hated—shouldn't we try for that?"

"....."

"Hey, Tiir. You know already, don't you? No matter how much you run, this world is full of humans. Our side isn't so small either. If that's the case... If it's like that, shouldn't we all try to get along, huh? So together with me..."

Then, Tiir turned around.

"Be quiet,"

He said.

"Please be quiet,"

He said that.

"Why are you saying those kinds of things? Even though all that's left within humans is hatred... in spite of that, you would say such things? Have you forgotten what they did to you? The way humans looked at you with those eyes—have you forgotten those eyes, full of contempt?"

He asked.

And to that,

"I remember,"

Ryner replied.

There was no way he could forget. After all, he was continuously scorned as a monster. After all, as a worthless existence, he was continuously feared as an unsightly monster.

And he stopped coming into contact with people. Because he was afraid that he would get hurt if he did, he stopped moving forward.

Nevertheless—

"But I hate being alone even more."

"....."

"Besides, my friends are good guys."

"....."

"So I want you all to be with us. So come with us? Lafra wished for it... Hey, do you know what Lafra told me before he died? To save you. To save you all—that's what he told me. Together with humans, he wished for the sad Cursed Eye bearers to be saved..."

In a low voice, Tiir spoke.

"Wasn't Lafra also killed by those humans?"

Ryner nodded.

"Yeah. That's right. But Lafra wouldn't have resented them for it. Am I wrong?"

"... Ha, haha. Already, you've become ill. You **Alpha Stigma** bearers who believe in humans are always betrayed..."

"Betrayed or not, that's not important. Stop running away already. Because you might be killed, you're running away. But at least here, things are different. Against all odds, a Cursed Eye bearer like me has been accepted, and even though it's pretty troublesome, I'm hailed as their important king. And there's an **Alpha Stigma** bearer named Arua too who's fighting with us even though he's just a kid. He's cooperating with humans and fighting with us in this war. He's still a brat, and yet he already has a human fiancée, you know? What do you think about that?"

"....."

"I’m not saying that there isn’t any discrimination, and I know there's still a chance I might be betrayed, but... but is that any reason not to cooperate? Because you don't want to be hurt, you'll run away? Don’t you think that's just a bit weak? Well, I’ve always been running away, so I don’t have the right to say that, but..."

Ryner said.

Tiir stared at him. And as a light smile arose in his face—

"... Weak? We’re weak...? Ah, haha, I see. I understand. Are you trying to provoke me? However, that won’t work, Ryner. I don’t see how I’m confining myself with this, which is what you’re trying to say to me..."

However, in a slightly louder voice, Ryner interrupted and spoke.

"Ah, geez, this isn’t working out. Then, how can I persuade you?"

"....."

"What can I do to make you my ally?"

"....."

"Lafra wished for that. After that, I've always been thinking about it. If going along with you all would be for the better? If going along with humans would be for the better? I can’t say what the correct answer is. I can’t say what the perfect solution is. However, that Cursed Eye bearers and humans don’t have to hate each other, that coexistence is necessary—that’s what I think. Humans have many opinions, so don't you think there's a way? If it doesn't seem possible, then we've got to think about this with everything we've got."

"....."

"Geez, this is reaaaaaaaally bothersome. If humans and Cursed Eye bearers were to be together—I think that would be good. Maybe things aren’t enough right now, but we just need to endure for a bit. So come with us. If you think I'm wrong, then come with us and see for yourself. Not running away... well, ah, um, what is it? That wasn’t said very well, but anyway, this is really troublesome and just hurry up and become my ally already!"

He shouted those words.

And to that,

"....."

As expected, Tiir was silent.

No, he looked at Ryner as if Ryner were a complete idiot—he looked at him with a dumbfounded expression, and then suddenly turned around. With the other Cursed Eye bearers accompanying him, they started to leave the area.

And in that instant,

"As one would expect from Ryner. Great at explaining things to people,"

Ferris said, to which Ryner looked at her with half-closed eyes and spoke.

"... Sion would've done a better job, huh?"

"You aren't him. However, now, now, you put your heart into that speech."

"Is that supposed to be a compliment?"

"Mmm."

"Don't just nod like that..."

Ryner said, letting out a light sigh. He watched the disappearing backs of Tiir and the others.

He watched the Cursed Eye bearers who were quickly escaping from the awakening humans.

And then again, he thought of the late Lafra's words.

The moment of his death.

Just before he was killed by the Lightning Beasts of Lir's—of the Gastark soldier—he spoke.

Knowing that he was about to die, that guy smiled kindly.

"I'm truly glad to have met you."

He said that.

"You'll definitely keep your promise."

He said that.

And then, he died.

Smiling like that, he died.

Entrusting the other Cursed Eye bearers with Ryner, he died.

He thought of Lafra's expression, and then staring at Tiir's back,

"... He pushed a seriously bothersome task onto me, huh?"

He muttered.

Looking up at Ryner,

"... So, is it all right not to go with those guys?"

Ferris asked that sort of thing, to which Ryner looked at her.

"Hmm~? Did you want me to go with them?"

Then to that,

"It doesn't matter either way. I'm only interested in the level of dango the Cursed Eye bearers make,"

She easily said such a thing.

Really, the last time Ryner left, she'd spoken much more forcefully.

Yet she said that.

"....."

To that, Ryner didn't know what to say. And how she talked about Tiir's group, he thought about that.

Rather than talk about the prejudiced Cursed Eyes or about humans, she swung her sword and always talked about dango, dango—an annoying woman. If Tiir were to get to know her, then his opinion of humans might change, Ryner thought.

To that,

"You really like dango, huh?"

Ryner said, to which she nodded.

"Of course."

"Of course?"

"Mm-hmm. Of course!"

"... Hum,"

He said, laughing.

He looked up at the sky.

The sky was starting to brighten up, as night faded away.

And with the sun’s rays, he could start to see the Anti-Roland Coalition army and his Nelphan allies.

Furthermore, it became noisier. The soldiers who were supposed to be standing on guard had fallen asleep as well and were now confused over just what had happened to them.

While thinking about how *I don't wanna explain*, he looked up at the morning sky one more time, and,

"... I really hate having to get up and do work in the middle of the night,"

He muttered.

At that,

"So, in the end, what were those guys fighting over?"

Ferris asked.

By "those guys", she meant Tiir and Lieral, it seemed.

However, Ryner only shrugged in response and didn't answer.

After all, in the end, he didn't know what had happened here.

Really, he couldn’t tell what the relationship between Lieral and Tiir and the other Cursed Eye bearers was.

On top of that, they’d caused a disturbance, but in the end, they left before explaining anything.

"They don't seem to be on good terms, huh?"

He said without thinking.

"No, well, Dad is... Tiir didn’t take my hand, huh? ... Well, I’m starting to think that was pointless. I didn't get a whole lot of information."

At those words, Ferris at his side—

"You're just a flea, so anything you think is pointless."

"Yes, yes, that's nice."

"So is it really fine that you didn't go? That's what I'm saying. Previously, your father too—didn't they all go back to their leader? If you'd gone with them, you would've at least learned their reasons..."

Ryner directed his gaze from the sky to Ferris.

And then behind her, he recognized Kiefer's figure, and looked at her expression as it became surprised.

Furthermore, he could also see Toale. *Ryner-san*, he called.

Those two began to run towards him.

Ryner smiled at that. And again, he looked at Ferris.

"... My place is here,"

He said.

"I still don't know what the situation is, but... there's still the war with Gastark and Geihlficlant, isn't there? Let's not get sidetracked from that."

As he said that, Ferris looked his way.

"....."

For some reason, she smiled.

Her face was normally expressionless; however, she smiled happily.

And to that, Ryner smiled wryly back, and then looked in the direction of Kiefer and Toale, who were running towards them.

With his **cursed** eyes.

However, reflected in those hated, sleepy **eyes**, were his friends.

Chapter 2: Passion and Love

"Ryner!"

Kiefer called out.

Like that, she moved to hug him. At her who was pressing her head and soft red hair into his chest,

"....."

Ryner made a troubled face as he looked down at her.

And,

"... Ah, sorry. You were worried?"

He said.

At that, Kiefer shook her head, still buried in his chest.

"I'm so glad that you awakened,"

She said in a voice that was already trembling as if she were crying, at which Ryner's expression became increasingly troubled.

Then he looked at Ferris to his side. Not even especially looking at Kiefer hugging him, she didn't appear to be thinking anything.

Following that, he looked at Toale.

Brown hair, gentle eyes. However, those eyes were somewhat cloudy. His eyes weren't looking at Ryner, but instead at Kiefer.

"....."

A while ago, he'd come out, and so it seemed that he liked Kiefer. But he was backing down for Ryner.

After all, it was clear to anyone whom Kiefer held feelings towards. In the war, Kiefer had announced the truth before everyone in a loud voice.

That she loved Ryner, she said in a loud voice.

And regarding that,

"....."

Naturally, Ryner had been aware.

He wasn't an idiot. Being treated so favourably, it was obvious. Years ago, back when they were still in the Roland Empire Royal Military Academy, playing around, he'd already been aware.

It was already a long, long time ago. Sion wasn't burdened with anything. Back when Tyle, Toni, and Fahl were still alive, he'd always been aware of her feelings.

He'd noticed; however, he'd pretended that he hadn't.

Because he wasn't qualified to accept her feelings. Because that he wasn't qualified to accept the feelings of pretty, kind, and earnest girl like her was what he'd thought—

That was why he'd always tried to run away.

He ran away from having to respond to her feelings.

Claiming that he was a cursed monster, he'd always been running away.

Despite that, she'd gone on a journey around the world to solve the mystery of the **Alpha Stigma**.

In order to save him, she'd gone around the world.

He didn't know how he should respond to those feelings.

Even without these **eyes**, he didn't think he was someone worthy of being considered important by a good girl like her.

At any rate, he was the kind of man that Ferris was always talking about.

A coward, a good-for-nothing, someone who can waste away for an eternity, a worthless man who's always saying that it'd be good if he could sleep for fifteen years after this—whyyyy would she like someone like me, huh? He thought.

She shouldn't choose someone like me, he wanted to tell her.

A good girl like her choosing a monster like me...

"....."

He was again thinking those kinds of thoughts; however, he denied them.

Furthermore, he recalled the words Lieral had told him.

"Those eyes aren't genetic..."

Those words.

Then his father had said this.

"Whether they're genetic or not—why am I talking about that? If your child's eyes are cursed, then shouldn't it be good to protect them with everything you have?"

He said such a thing.

"Being afraid of such trivial things will destroy your life, won't it? We wanted to use our lives for a purpose. We struggled to become happy. To smile each day, to have a beloved daughter and whatnot, to become happier than anyone else—that was what we cried out for."

He'd talked about those kinds of things.

And Ryner thought a bit about that.

—To have a beloved daughter, to have children, and be smiling happily each day.

He wouldn't think those thoughts anymore.

He wouldn't wish that he could be average and live a normal human's life again.

But his father had insisted and spoken.

His father said that he had a duty to be happy.

Plus, he himself had said something similar to Tiir earlier. To not run away and instead move forward—he'd said that in a self-important manner.

And, what that originated from,

"....."

Ryner looked down at Kiefer.

Looking down at the girl who said that she loved him,

"....."

Ah~, he thought.

What do I do? He thought.

Because he honestly didn't feel that he was suitable for romance, he had no idea whatsoever how to respond, as he scratched his bedhead hair in a troubled manner.

What might be a good way to react to a girl's feelings, what he should do, how he should feel—right now, he didn't know.

That was why he grasped Kiefer's shoulders, and while pulling her away from him,

"Hey, Kiefer. When you get so close like that..."

He began, but then—*ah, will Kiefer be hurt by those words?* He realized that. *Eh, maybe I shouldn't say that...* He worried about such things alone, and having sensed his thoughts or some such, Kiefer looked up at him.

"Ah, sorry..."

She said, making a slightly lonely expression. She removed herself from him. She was always like that. Looking at the faces of the surrounding people, she behaved exactly as they did.

And Ryner looked at that expression.

Looking at the expression of Kiefer, who was obviously somewhat hurt,

"....."

No, no, though it's obviously impossible for me to suddenly developing feelings for her... Thinking that, he wanted to groan.

Though he'd always been staying away from people, he wasn't, as expected, able to come up with the right words to quickly shorten that distance at all.

At that, his father's *"Your eyes aren't genetic"* words—he really didn't know at all about that.

"....."

Though he'd hurt her slightly, he made a cheerful smile as if he were oblivious as he looked at Kiefer.

Then, in a bored manner, he looked at, to the side, the other Anti-Roland Coalition soldiers who were opening their eyes, and then at Ferris's face.

Staring at these two people's faces,

"... Hum,"

Ryner said.

Though there wasn't really any meaning in his *hum*. On the contrary, he didn't know what he was *hum*-ing about; however, at any rate, he stopped thinking about it.

This wasn't the time and place for that. On top of that, various things happened last night, and so there was a bit of chaos. Anyhow,

"Toale,"

He said, looking at the prince of Imperial Nelpha.

In response, Toale looked his way, and,

"Yes?"

He said, nodding.

At that, Ryner spoke.

"You're probably wondering about this disturbance. After all, all of the Anti-Roland Coalition soldiers standing watch suddenly fainted..."

Toale nodded at that.

"Though I was also standing watch, I fainted. As for what in the world happened here, Ryner-san, you..."

In response, Ryner nodded.

"I know. So, could you tell everyone that there's no need to panic? It wasn't an enemy that came."

Though Toale made a face at him like he wanted a somewhat more detailed explanation, he immediately nodded, and,

"I'll tell all the troops. Then we'll be resuming our march,"

Toale said.

Though Ryner didn't know where the army was headed and wanted to ask about that, he'd have to first bring the uproar to a close, and so he didn't ask.

Toale began moving towards the disorderly soldiers.

After affirming that, Ryner looked at Kiefer.

She—

"Ryner, is your body really..."

However, interrupting that, he answered,

"It's fine. I just need a bi~t of sleep, that's all."

"Geez, after sleeping for so long, you still need sleep~?"

Kiefer said, smiling, but unsurprisingly, she gazed at him with a worried expression.

At that, Ferris replied,

"Idiots don't catch colds."

"Hey, it wasn't that I caught a cold, you know,"

Ryner said, to which Kiefer made a slightly ill-tempered expression as she looked at Ferris.

"Wh~y are you saying such things, Ferris-san, when you stayed by Ryner's side while he slept, nursing him..."

She began, but her words only made it that far.

Ferris kicked Kiefer's chest. At that,

"Kya—"

Kiefer said, being blown off while smiling.

Following that, Ferris glared at Ryner, and,

"That woman is spitting out lies,"

She said.

"I'm not your nurse, after all,"

She said such things.

Ryner smiled at that.

"Ah, yes, yes, I understand,"

He said, nodding.

In reality, that Ferris, Kiefer, and Toale had attended to him who was sleeping for so long and wouldn't open his eyes at all, he knew.

In addition to that, he'd used his power.

In the war, Ryner had killed countless people.

In order to protect his friends, he'd killed an unforgivably large amount of people.

The number possibly surpassed a million.

Like a demon or devil from a fairy tale, which was still putting it somewhat lightly, Ryner had done that.

Furthermore, in order to unleash that power, he'd taken his mother's life.

Though his father told him to be happy, he didn't feel that it was right to accept those words, having taken so many lives.

However, these guys didn't care about that.

Instead, they focused on him with worried expressions.

Regarding that, Ryner became increasingly troubled. Even though he didn't think it was right to accept himself as a monster, he was an unknown being that'd killed over a million people, and yet these guys accepted him.

They said that it was all right to be by their side.

At that, Ryner, while wondering what would be the best thing to do, made a half-crying face, and,

"....."

He looked towards the group of Anti-Roland Coalition soldiers who were beginning to quickly move.

It seemed their direction was to the south, from where the sun was rising.

Regarding that, Ryner asked,

"Hey, Kiefer. Where is this group of soldiers going?"

Kiefer, who'd fallen slightly back after being kicked by Ferris, approached him.

"Though I think Vois probably wants to merge with the main army that he brought along..."

She said.

At that,

"Main body?"

Ryner asked.

"The soldiers here aren't the main army? Didn't we bring along the entire army of the Anti-Roland Coalition here to fight with Gasta..."

He began, but then Kiefer made a slightly dark expression.

And in response, he remembered.

Back when Ryner was still unsure regarding reality and dreams, thanks to Lieral's magic, Toale, who'd been watching over him, had also made that face.

If he recalled correctly, back then, Toale had something like this regarding the present situation.

—Gastark temporarily retreated. And after that Vois Fiurelle-kun, as if he had predicted something like that would happen, spun around happily.

At that, Ryner looked at Kiefer, and,

"Then, Vois isn't here,"

He asked, to which she nodded.

In response, he then asked,

"So, where is he now?"

She responded like this:

"... Um, since Geihlficlant's territory has been weakened from the war with Gastark..."

"He's attacking?"

Kiefer nodded.

To that, Ryner spoke in a groan.

"Damn it, because I killed Geihlficlant's soldiers,"

He began, but she shook her head as if to deny that.

"Ryner, it's not your..."

"I know. That's why I decided to use my power. If I hadn't, then Gastark... Glovil would've killed the Geihlficlant soldiers."

"....."

"But that was Vois's aim? To attack Geihlficlant, weakened from the war with Gastark. On top of that, to attack using **Rhule Fragmei**. Well, though he'd said as much from the beginning, that he'd really do it..."

He began, but then stopped himself.

"No, he's that kind of guy?"

He said, as Toale returned.

"Everyone said that there aren't any problems. And south..."

However, he then noticed.

He looked at Ryner's right hand.

Staring at the right hand Ryner should've lost,

"Um, Ryner-san."

"Hmm?"

"Your right hand?"

He asked, to which Ryner responded.

"Ah, this? Uh, lots of things happened. Ah~, no, it's a long story, so I'll explain while we move. More importantly, that Vois is running around wildly, isn't he?"

He asked, at which Toale again made a serious face.

Ryner smiled wryly at that, and,

"That was a scary question, huh~? But I have to ask. What the hell is going on now? Right now, our... what's the situation with the Anti-Roland Coalition?"

He asked.

By only what was said, it seemed like the situation wasn't very good. They'd successfully gotten Gastark to temporarily retreat; however, because the soldiers there were protected by Glovil, they hadn't been destroyed. They'd reorganize themselves and return immediately, most likely.

Furthermore, Ryner and co. had killed the soldiers of Geihlficlant, whom they were supposed to be allied with. Of course, they hadn't purposely killed them. Rather, they hadn't had a choice.

However, that kind of excuse wouldn't go over well. Surely, the alliance with Geihlficlant had been revoked. If that were the case, then there might be pursuers as well.

That was why they couldn't stay here like this; however, he didn't recall Toale or Kiefer saying anything about them having to escape immediately.

More importantly, he was troubled by Vois's movements.

"What the hell is going on now?"

Ryner asked, but to that,

"....."

Kiefer and Toale didn't answer.

Then Ferris turned his way, and,

"... What's being kept secret will reach you soon enough anyway. I'll tell you,"

She said such a thing.

At that, Kiefer said,

"But Ferris-san, Ryner just woke up, so just wait for a bit..."

However, then,

"No, she's right. We can't keep it hidden forever."

Toale said.

Somehow, it seemed that something bad had happened.

In response, Ryner looked at the three's expressions.

"Since you're trying to hide it from me, I'm assuming it's something bad regarding me?"

To that, Ferris stared at him, and,

"Yeah,"

She said, nodding.

At that, Ryner asked,

"But even if you try and prolong it, it'll reach me eventually?"

"That's right."

"In that case, hurry up and tell me."

"If I thought that it would be that easy, then..."

"Come on, just stop messing with me."

"....."

Ferris became silent at that. Then she looked towards Toale and Kiefer.

Toale opened his mouth; however, she cut him off and then, staring at Ryner, spoke.

"... You're being called the Demon King,"

She said that.

"No, Vois has been threatening the entire world by saying that you're a demon that spreads death and destruction."

In response to those words, Ryner spoke.

"In other words, I've become a celebrity to the world?"

"That's how it is."

"The people of this world think of me as a demon, then?"

"Correct."

"Then, Vois is using my name to get Geihlficlant to surrender so that he can steal their territory?"

But Ferris shook her head at that.

"... It seems that, including the women and children, all of the people in the territories Vois attacked have been slaughtered using **Rhule Fragmei**."

"....."

"And he's been threatening those that won't surrender that they'll be devoured and killed by the demon."

"....."

"But halfway, he suddenly changed opinions. He's divided the Geihlficlant Empire into parts, established the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, and begun to advocate for world peace. No, it's not that he's advocating for it. Rather, for the sake of world peace, he's begun to propose a world-wide ban on **Rhule Fragmei**."

To such words.

Ryner said in a low voice.

"Oh?"

He said.

And,

"... Even though we killed the people of Geihlficlant with **Rhule Fragmei**, now we're talking about world peace?"

"Correct."

"On top of that, he's using my name? He's using my name as a threat so that he doesn't have to use **Rhule Fragmei** on other countries?"

"Yeah."

"....."

At that, Ryner had to admire Vois's intelligence.

Rather, if he'd planned this entire scenario out in his head from even before the war with Gastark, then he was the real monster, Ryner thought.

Furthermore, if it came down to it, his hand wouldn't waver at all.

He'd rise to the top using the shortest route and, furthermore, with the least amount of sacrifices.

It was completely like Sion.

Sion, who, while crying, invaded the southern continent—Vois was doing the same.

But he was using Ryner's name for that.

For some reason, Ryner became the king of this Anti-Roland Coalition. This was why, in order to do this, Ryner became so.

The same way as Sion did, Ryner established a country, and such things.

"....."

Even though Ryner should've been working hard to save Sion, who seemed to be carrying some kind of burden and had become strange, he'd done the same thing as Sion but to the central continent, going around the world.

Furthermore, Ryner was now apparently the Demon King threatening the world.

Though he'd scattered **Rhule Fragmei** to kill people, he was now dishonourably calling for world peace.

And in his core, Ryner wasn't like that.

Always wanting to sleep, he wasn't like that.

Regarding that, he smiled in self-deprecation, and,

"... What's with this? Seriously, I'm a complete and utter puppet,"

He muttered.

At that,

"If you're talking about right now, then it seems that way,"

Ferris said.

In response, Ryner looked her way.

"Then are we going south to stop Vois?"

He began, but regarding that,

"No, that's not it. It looks like Vois-kun has called for us to return to the country,"

Kiefer said.

To return to the country.

In other words, to return to the country that Vois had apparently established at some point.

No, there was nowhere else to go. The Anti-Roland Coalition soldiers who'd originally been Vois's allies, and the soldiers and people of Imperial Nelpha that Ryner and co. had brought along—there was nowhere else they belonged to.

In that case, if there was a place that would accept them, they had no choice.

Put another way, Vois had prepared such a place. He'd completely established a new country. In that case, that was the only place they could go.

Regarding that,

"... Seriously, our worst enemies are our own allies, huh?"

Ryner groaned.

In spite of what he'd told Tiir earlier, the leader here wasn't Ryner. Vois was the one who set everything up within the organization, and was only using Ryner as a puppet king.

But, in that case,

"... What should I do?"

He said, murmuring in a voice that couldn't be heard by anyone else.

From this point on, what should I do? He muttered that to himself.

If he didn't bother to think at all and instead merely went with the flow of things without a care, nothing would change, he knew.

Because he'd always been like that.

If he left it all to Sion, that guy would take on all the problems by himself.

If he left it all to Vois, that guy would selfishly use another person's name as much as he pleased.

No, up until now, all his life, he'd been leaving it all to someone else.

Until someone told him that they cared about him, he couldn't move.

Until someone told him that it was okay for him to live, he couldn't even see his own worth.

With this, it's again like that.

With that brat doing whatever he wants, it's like that, he thought.

And,

"... I can't hate that brat too much,"

He muttered.

Then, his thoughts began to whirl around.

He shouldn't just leave all the leadership duties to Vois. In this kind of situation, that was what one was expected to. If they were slightly motivated, that was what was expected of them.

Rather, it wasn't enough to resign himself to do only that much. That was why he'd become this way.

It was only obvious.

For a guy who had doubts about if it was even all right for him to live, it didn't seem like he could do such things as save people or lead them.

But,

"... Toale, is there an available horse?"

Ryner asked.

Toale looked his way.

"To go where Vois-kun is?"

At the question, he nodded.

"Toale, you stay here and lead the people in after me. I'll go meet with Vois first,"

He said, as he began to walk.

At that, Kiefer worriedly began,

"But Ryner, after using your power in that last battle, your body's still..."

Ryner spoke, interrupting her.

"Just because my body's not in the best condition doesn't mean I should go sleep. I've always been slacking off. But if I don't take part in things once in a while..."

After saying that, his thoughts whirled around harder. In what way could he guide things from hereon? How could he take back the reins from that swindling brat? He wondered.

While thinking, he approached a nearby soldier on a horse. Dressed in a black uniform, it was a soldier of the Anti-Roland Coalition—one of Vois's subordinates.

Looking up at him,

"Hey, could I borrow your horse?"

Ryner said.

The soldier looked down at him with cold eyes. He stared scornfully down at Ryner, who was supposed to be the leader of the Anti-Roland Coalition, and,

"What reason do I have to abide by your ord..."

Ryner didn't pay attention to what he was saying and instead pulled the soldier down from the horse.

The soldier glared at him, and,

"You bastard!"

He said.

He swung a fist up at him.

Ryner moved to stop that fist; however, before it could connect, Ferris struck at the soldier from behind.

With only that, the soldier lost consciousness. He collapsed onto the ground.

At that, Ryner looked at Ferris.

"Oh, thanks..."

As he was saying that, Ferris then let out a kick at Ryner's face.

It was incredibly quick.

It was quick to the point where he couldn't dodge it at all.

In response to the kick that was unleashed with all its strength,

"Guah—!?"

He said, as he was sent flying.

However, she paid him no heed and got on the horse. With a satisfied *mm-hmm*, she nodded. And looking down at him with eyes a hundred times colder than the previous soldier's,

"What are you doing, blockhead? Hurry up and find a horse,"

She said such a thing.

At that,

"Ehhhhhhhh~"

Ryner said, looking up at her with an exasperated expression.

"But that was the horse I was just eyeing."

"So?"

"Um."

"Now, hurry up. We're going to where Vois is, aren't we?"

As she said that, Ryner nodded.

"Yeah."

Kiefer then rushed to the fallen soldier, and,

"A-Are you all right!?"

She said.

Then, to the other Anti-Roland Coalition soldiers,

"Um, everyone's ally fell from his horse..."

She said, rushing over as she did.

It seemed that there was a dispute between the Anti-Roland Coalition soldiers and Ryner's group.

No, well, as Vois was likely still making use of Ryner's name and power, there wasn't any real harm in adding more problems to the pile.

However, there was no question of whether or not it was fine to create a dispute.

"... This is bad, Kiefer."

As he said that, she looked up at him with a cheerful face, and,

"It's been like that from the begiiiining, since you became motivated, Ryner,"

She said.

"Buuut, since it's for the best that you've become resolute, I'll allow it～"

At her words, Ryner looked up at Ferris, who looked triumphant over having gotten a horse, and,

"Even though, after stealing a horse, I just got kicked away in the end?"

He said, to which Kiefer laughed.

"That's just because you haven't become resolute enough～"

"Wh～at's that supposed to mean?"

As Ryner retorted that, Toale brought along two horses from the Nelphan forces.

He also seemed to be surprised as he looked in their direction.

"Honestly, I can't even leave for a couple of minutes without everything erupting into chaos."

"Uwah, now we're being lectured,"

Ryner said, to which Kiefer went *"This is bad~"* and again laughed.

While smiling wryly at that,

"Then, should we get going?"

Ryner said, taking a horse from Toale and straddling it. Then, to Toale,

"Iris, Arua, and Kuku?"

Toale nodded, and,

"I'll bring them along,"

He said.

At that, Kiefer began,

"Then, with Iris-chan and the others, I'll also..."

But in response, Toale for some reason lightly hit Kiefer's back.

"Kiefer-san, please go with Ryner-san as well. I'll be fine here by myself. There are plenty of excellent Nelphan soldiers with me here,"

He said.

Regarding that, Kiefer's eyes widened in curiosity as she looked in Toale's direction.

Toale smiled, and then for some reason looked up at Ryner, who was making a bored face, and,

"I'm too soft-hearted, aren't I?"

He said.

Ryner smiled at that.

"I've thought that since we first met."

Toale smiled, and then looked around.

Looking at the Anti-Roland Coalition soldiers dressed in black

uniforms,

"But this isn't a place where soft-hearted people can survive, is it?"

He said such a thing.

"There are enemies all around us, huh? If Ryner-san intends to change... I should try and work hard for a bit and stop being a soft-hearted person, shouldn't I?"

He said, as his typically calm face tightened slightly.

Ryner looked down at Toale with half-closed eyes, and,

"If you're saying that you haven't worked hard, then neither have I."

Then Ferris spoke.

"Because you're trash."

"Nooo, that's not the point."

"So you finally feel like acknowledging the truth..."

"Ah, geez, just shut up already, you,"

Ryner said, as Kiefer straddled a horse.

"All right. I'm good to go as well,"

She said.

Ryner nodded at that.

"Then, Vois is..."

He began, and then,

"Wait, where is Vois..."

Then, Kiefer spoke.

"The People's Republic of Sphelliyet. I think the name likely came from a town in the center of Geihlficlant called Sphellilans, though..."

"Kiefer, do you know where it is?"

"Yes. It's quite close to here."

"Then show us the way."

"Understood,"

Kiefer said, as her horse began to move.

At that, Ferris said,

"Trailing a woman from behind, you sneakily approach..."

"Like I said, you need to shut up already,"

Ryner said, to which Ferris laughed with a *fufufu*, before her horse began to move as well.

Ryner then looked at Toale one more time, and,

"Then, we'll be going. You..."

"Please leave everything else to me. I've checked the map as well. Judging by its location, I think we should be able to head there without being attacked by Geihlficlant soldiers."

At such words, Ryner smiled wryly, and,

"Everyone's so well-acquainted with the map, huh?"

He said, to which Toale smiled.

"Though it seems Kiefer-san knew from the beginning, I studied it while you were asleep, Ryner-san."

"Huuuh. You're as diligent as ever."

"Are you going to become the same from hereon, Ryner-san?"

At those words,

"Meee?"

Ryner replied with an annoyed face, before,

"Well, I'll be going for a bit,"

He said, commanding his horse to gallop. Then he immediately caught up with Ferris and co.

Moving to her side,

"... Hey, Ferris."

"Hmm?"

"Um, could you listen to me for a little bit?"

"What is it?"

"About what Vois did."

"Mmm."

"... Um, about how I've become the Demon King who's killed countless people~, and whatnot, and that indecent ban on **Rhule Fragmei** and other stupid stuff like that..."

"Mm-hmm."

"Well... Well, Sion's definitely..."

Then, Ferris spoke.

"Naturally, Sion will hear about it."

"... That's definitely the case, huh?"

"But he won't believe it. You, who sleeps from morning until evening without working, would go around killing people and stealing Geihlficlant's territory? You're not capable of such a thing,"

She said.

However, regarding that, Ryner made a slightly vulnerable expression, and,

"But I killed countless..."

"Be quiet."

"But—"

"Did you think that when Sion began invading other countries?"

"....."

"Did you hate him for it?"

"... No."

"Then, you're the same as him. Getting worried over pointless things,"

She said.

Ryner let out a quiet laugh at that, and,

"... Pointless things, huh? Some~how, lately, you've been encouraging me a lot..."

He said in a quiet voice so that she couldn't hear.

Despite that, in response, she—

"Well, I've grown to hate you."

"Eh—"

"Yesterday, you selfishly entered my tent as you pleased. Like a pervert,"

She said such things.

Furthermore, for some reason, her face became red as if embarrassed.

"Haa? Tent? What are you talking about?"

"What we're talking about."

"Huh~? What the hell are you..."

Then Kiefer turned towards them, and,

"Heeey, what are you two talking about amongst yourselves and leaving me out of?"

She said.

At that,

"Why I'm with this pervert?"

Ferris said.

In response, Ryner looked in awe at Ferris who, unsurprisingly, wasn't looking at him.

"I've got no idea what Ferris is talking about. Something about me entering her tent last night... Well, Ferris is always saying random things, but... more importantly, Kiefer."

"Yes?"

"That Sphe... phewha..."

"The People's Republic of Sphelliyet."

"Right, right, the People's Republic of Sphelliyet—hey, ah, that name has part of the name of Vois's native country, the Iyet Republic... Anyway, um, how long will we be moving?"

She then looked up at the sky, making a face as if she were calculating the distance.

"If we hurry, until evening..."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Then, let's hurry it up a bit,"

Ryner said. He kicked the horse's abdomen. The horse began to speed up a little.

And while running, he thought about the earlier topics.

For example, how he should move forward regarding the matter with Vois?

What should he do about Vois, who was using his name to establish the People's Republic of Sphelliyet?

How could he get along with Tiir and the Cursed Eye bearers?

What should he do with Kiefer, Ferris, and his friends?

And Sion—

"....."

As everything he'd known had continued to suddenly change, there were several things to think about.

If he stopped his legs for a little while, it'd be too late for so many things—he was tired of that.

No, with the truth before his eyes, he'd lost several things.

Because he hadn't worked hard.

Because he'd resigned himself and stopped moving.

Because he'd continued to run away.

And so, from hereon, things would be different—if he made a mistake in his judgment, his friends would be hurt, lost, and cry.

"... It's fine, already. Even if I hate working hard."

While saying that, he continued to think.

What would be the right thing to do from here?

Just what would be the right way to move in this world?

With those things turning over and over again in his head,

"Ah, geez, this sucks,"

He complained from the bottom of his heart.

Chapter 3: A World Without Pain

With a small needle, he stabbed the palm of his hand countless times.

"....."

However, he didn't feel any pain.

No, he didn't feel anything.

As if it'd been completely paralyzed, he didn't feel any pain in the palm of his hand.

His hand moved. The nerves were connected properly. But it was only the needle's contact that he couldn't feel.

The reason was simple.

It'd been stolen.

His sense of touch had been stolen.

No, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he gave it up.

He gave his sense of touch up to the sword.

"....."

Riphal Edea stopped stabbing the palm of his hand with the needle, and lifted his head.

Loose, wavy peach-coloured hair, one eye.

With that eye, he looked to his side and looked at a long sword.

So long that one wouldn't think that a person could use it, a jet black sword.

Known as the **Sword of Regeneration** [Glovil], it was a cursed sword.

By devouring Riphal's body, that sword was able to unleash massive

power. It was able to unleash power so great that one wouldn't think a person could use it.

And as compensation, it stole away his sense of touch this time.

Even if he were sliced at by a sword, he'd no longer feel anything.

Even if he were stabbed by a spear, he wouldn't feel anything.

And on the reverse end, even if he were to be touched by someone he loved, he wouldn't be able to feel anything.

"....."

At that, he became slightly uneasy.

If he became someone who felt nothing at all, he'd become unable to feel a person's pain.

He could become someone who felt nothing no matter whom he killed—at the idea, he became slightly uneasy.

Even if it weren't like that, to reach this point, he'd taken an unbelievable amount of lives.

As he swung his sword that possessed abnormal power, he took thousands, tens of thousands of lives.

Of course, he had a just cause.

There was a reason that he had to do what he did.

But, reason or not, murderers weren't to be forgiven. And so, he didn't believe that to be a justification.

Rather, he cursed it. He resented it—that was what he thought.

But if he became someone who felt nothing, then he would no longer be able to perceive resentment and such things—at the idea, he became uneasy.

A monster that felt nothing no matter whom he killed.

A monster that felt nothing even over killing someone he loved.

"... A monster, huh?"

He said, staring at the palm of his hand that felt nothing even though it was dyed red with his blood after stabbing himself.

"... Well, this is for monster extermination. Even if I become a monster, there's nothing wrong, is there?"

He said, smiling sadly.

Then he tightly balled his hand into a fist. Applying pressure to the blood vessels, he stopped the bleeding.

Right now, he was in a church.

In spite of using Glovil after paying a price to it, he wasn't able to destroy the Geihlficlant Empire, and so his soldiers had retreated to the Divine City of Elon.

No, it wasn't as simple as something like retreating, was it?

They fled.

From Geihlficlant's side, there'd been a weapon of abnormal power that Gastark hadn't recognized.

It was a weapon that held tremendous power—enough to counterbalance Glovil.

An weapon of abnormal power that stole tens of hundreds of thousands of lives at once and furthemore altered the terrain.

In the presence of that power, Riphal and his people ran.

After all, if the other party was able to fire such power at random, then they had no chance of victory.

In order to use Glovil, he had to pay a heavy price. However, if the other party could unleash their power without limit, then they had absolutely no chance of victory.

Furthermore, regarding the one who unleashed that power, they knew nothing.

Thus, they ran.

Because they didn't come here to die.

Because they didn't come here to lose all their allies.

And they retreated here, to the Divine City of Elon. During the time it took to arrive here, expressions of panic and despair had arisen in the soldiers' faces.

It was only natural.

To lose a war that they were confident they would win and potentially be pursued—as it was like that, they continued to tremble.

On top of that, if they were pursued, it would all end in an instant.

Without any heed to strategy, tactics, and whatnot, if that weapon were to be used just once more, it would all end.

It was a situation in which there was no way to express the insanity of it all.

No, that was likely what the soldiers of the previous countries had thought of Glovil.

That a person would use such a weapon was abnormal.

They would've thought it to be insane.

And what went around came around. An unknown weapon had been used against them, and while trembling in panic, they ran.

The soldiers' morale had plummeted. Though Rize was currently frantically reorganizing the army, up until the point where they'd retreated to the Divine City of Elon, there'd been a considerable amount of escapees.

But of course, Riphal didn't blame them. After he himself saw that kind of power, he wanted to run. He didn't want to remain in that sort of insane battle for even a moment.

On top of that, in the instant where that unknown weapon cancelled out the power of his sword, he'd felt slightly relieved.

Even though the power he'd sacrificed his sense of touch to invoke had been negated, he'd felt a bit like he'd been saved, nevertheless.

Because he, who up until now had been constantly slaughtering the other side so easily with Glovil, had been stopped.

And furthermore, because of that, he hadn't killed Kiefer.

"....."

Even though he knew he couldn't be making mistakes while advancing into the central continent, he was a bit grateful that Glovil had been stopped.

And as for who had done it, he immediately realized.

Ryner Lute.

Demon King Ryner Lute.

The rumours had spread across the world in the blink of an eye.

In the battle, the personification of a demon, Ryner Lute, had stood, and with a cursed breath, massacred millions of Gastark and Geihlficlant's soldiers.

"....."

This wasn't the truth.

At the very least, in that battle, Gastark hadn't lost a large number of their soldiers.

But it was fine that the truth was meaningless.

When it came to information warfare, those who moved first won.

Ryner Lute moved quickly. By distributing such information, he implanted panic into the world. And taking advantage of the chaos, he laid waste to Geihlficlant's land.

Furthermore, he'd shamelessly established his own country from within Geihlficlant.

And as Riphal thought about Ryner's Lute country that had rapidly grown in the span of ten days—the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, as it was called—he frowned.

Fearing the power that cancelled out Glovil's own, and making what one could call a mistake by escaping here to the Divine City of Elon, he cursed the weakness of his own heart.

Back then, if he'd attacked one more time with Glovil, he would've won.

If he watched the movements of the People's Republic of Sphelliyet in these past ten days, he understood that.

They were moving without relying on Ryner Lute's power. If, as a power that could cancel out Glovil, it could be fired so easily, then despite the possibility of using just that power to take the entire nation of Geihlficlant, they didn't do that.

By taking several parts, they announced the establishment of their country.

At the same time, they now seemed to be calling out for a ban on the use of **Rhule Fragmei**, etc. and a peace treaty.

In other words,

"... They can't match Glovil, is what's going on?"

He muttered, groaning.

It was likely that Ryner Lute couldn't continuously unleash that power. Furthermore, they weren't in possession of more **Rhule Fragmei** then Gastark.

That was why those guys called out to the world. By using the results of the battle just now, as they possessed the same power as Gastark, that was more than enough to make an appeal for the ban of such usage.

If they used it, it would be a violation of the peace treaty, and so could bring the situation up until now to an end in one blow.

And that, it would seem, was the path to success. Several countries would begin to approve of this treaty. The countries that had delayed in gathering **Rhule Fragmei** would begin to approve.

If the state of the world became a consensus of opinion like this, it would become difficult for Gastark to use their power.

As they had to fully expand into the central continent, if they became unable to use their power, that would be considerably bad.

Of course they'd resigned themselves from the beginning to becoming enemies with the world; however, from here on, even if

they used Glovil's power, there was a chance the enemy wouldn't surrender.

In the instant Gastark used Glovil, the world would become Gastark's enemy and seek assistance from the People's Republic of Sphelliyet.

They would seek assistance from the Demon King.

Do something about Gastark, who violated the treaty, they would say.

In other words, they were no longer able to advance forward while intimidating others into surrendering with Glovil.

If, by any chance, they wanted to forcibly advance, it would be necessary to do so by slaughtering the enemy.

Regarding that,

"... Definitely a demon, huh?"

Riphal murmured.

After all, because of this treaty, the number of sacrifices that would be made in order for Gastark to advance forward from now on just jumped up.

Enemy countries would no longer be willing to surrender.

In that case, they would have no choice but to kill.

No, that wasn't the only thing. Such like this, many sacrifices would emerge.

People would die.

Even more people would die than up until now.

Why Ryner Lute wished for that sort of thing, he didn't know, but,

"... Demon King... isn't that perfect?"

Riphal said, smiling sarcastically.

Then, the church gates opened, as a sole man entered.

Gastark's unique peach-coloured hair, clear blue eyes. As if to match

them, a blue-themed uniform of the Gastark Magic Knight Battalion.

Chief of Staff of all of Gastark Empire and commander of the Magic Knight Battalion, Rigwaltz Pentest.

That Rize spoke.

"Your Majesty."

At that, Riphal turned his head towards him, and,

"What is it?"

"There's an ambassador."

Regarding that, a smile arose in Riphal's face as he spoke.

"Sent by the Demon King?"

"Yes. It appears to be an ambassador from the People's Republic of Sphelliyet. They've come to speak directly with Your Majesty."

"I don't wannaaa."

As Riphal said that, Rize laughed.

"But the ambassador is a woman."

"All right, let's go right now."

"Same as always."

After Riphal laughed at that as well, he asked,

"So, in all honesty, what do you think we should do? If we agree to this ban on **Rhule Fragmei**, then from here, we won't be able to advance further into the central continent."

"Seems so."

"But we can't afford that. We have to go and kill the **Goddesses** and the **Hero**."

"Yes."

"In that case, what should we do?"

After making a slightly thoughtful face at that, Rize said,

"Participate in the treaty."

"Hoh."

"Then, immediately betray them. One way or another, from hereon, we'll become the villains who use **Rhule Fragmei** in the war. In that case, at the very least, we can't be unprepared."

"So we'll say that we won't use them, and then immediately use them?"

"Correct."

"Well, you've always been an underhanded guy from the beginning. Seducing girls by saying that you definitely won't do anything, and then transforming into a wolf at night, right?"

As he said that, Rize glared at him, and,

"That's better than being a wolf from morning like you, Riphal, wouldn't you say?"

"Eh~, what are you saying about the virginal me?"

"An amateur virgin?"

"*Ah*—!?"

"So, the truth of Riphal's shock so far..."

"H-Hey—! What truth? I'll seriously punch you, you know."

While hurling such pointless things at him, Rize tiredly stood up.

And he asked,

"So, is the ambassador sent by the Demon King cute?"

Rize shrugged, and,

"It's troubling how a virgin thinks only of women..."

"Be quiet. So, where is the ambassador? I have to meet with her, don't I?"

Rize nodded, and said,

"Outside the church, the Orla siblings are restraining her and

waiting."

"Then, let them enter."

"Understood."

Saying that, Rize opened the gates behind them, and,

"Lir,"

He said.

With that, Lir Orla entered the church. Peach-coloured hair, and a trained, nimble body. A sharp smile overflowing with self-confidence.

Furthermore, his brother Sui and his sister Kuu entered.

Sui wore a calm expression, while Kuu, invoking the power of her scythe right now, had an emotionless expression.

And in the center of the Orla siblings, a lone woman stood.

No, rather than a woman, she was still young enough to be better called a girl.

She seemed to be around sixteen, seventeen years old?

Bright brown hair, and black eyes that didn't match it. With those eyes, she stared straight in this direction.

Receiving that gaze, Riphal smiled as he spoke.

"Hoh, the one sent by the Demon King is rather pretty."

At that, the girl replied,

"You flatter me..."

She began, but interrupting that,

"Ah, ah, you can stop it with the formal speech. After all, you guys are our enemy, aren't you? You've come to plot against us. Despite that, you would thank me for the praise? I'd rather you didn't be insincere,"

Riphal said.

In response, the girl gazed at him, and,

"... As the rumours say."

"Rumours? What kind of rumours?"

However, the girl didn't answer the question.

Riphal laughed.

"Bad rumours?"

"Were you hoping for good rumours?"

"No,"

He said, as a smile spread across his face. Then, staring at the girl,

"So, your name?"

To that, the girl tilted her head in a curious manner.

"Aren't I your enemy? You want to know the name of your enemy?"

"It's my policy to properly ask for the name of a beautiful girl."

"....."

"You don't need to be so tense about it. It's my policy not to kill women. You'll return to your leader in good health. That's why I'm asking for your name. I don't ask for the name of people I'm about to kill."

In response to those words, the girl gazed at him with those black eyes, and,

"Relca,"

She said.

"Relca Redehna."

"Ehh. That's a good name."

"Even if you praise me, I don't feel especially happy about it."

To those words, Riphal laughed and nodded.

"Good. Now that you're acting like that, I'm willing to listen to what you have to say. I wouldn't be willing to listen to someone who knows that they're an enemy and yet tries to delude me, you see? So, talk. What have you come to say to me?"

At that, Relca began talking.

"I thought you might have heard from the kings of other countries already..."

She began, but unsurprisingly, Riphal spoke then.

"That you guys established the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, I know. I also know that you possess some strange weapon that's capable of cancelling out my Glovil. And I know that you're proposing a ban on **Rhule Fragmei** to the world. All of them are topics that are disadvantageous to us, huh? Well, anyway, that's enough of that, don't you think? So, is there anything else you want to talk to me about?"

At that, Relca said,

"Your intentions..."

However, interrupting that as well,

"We'll participate in the treaty,"

Riphal said.

"If that was the only thing you wanted to talk about, it's fine for you to return now."

"....."

"Or is there something else?"

Riphal asked.

In response, Relca stared at him, and,

"I have one thing to deliver from my leader."

"Hoh. From Ryner Lute?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

However, at that, Relca became quiet. Like she'd skillfully seized the initiative for the first time, a faint smile spread across her face as Riphal's attention was on her.

And she spoke.

What her leader wanted to say, she delivered to him.

"If, by any chance, you choose to use **Rhule Fragmei** and break the treaty, you will surely regret it."

"Heh. What's that supposed to mean?"

"The power that we possess that can cancel out Glovil's is one we can use freely. Should you oppose us..."

"We'll regret it?"

"Yes,"

She began, but then Riphal laughed, and,

"That's a lie,"

He said.

"If you really could use that power freely, you wouldn't need to make such a threat."

"... Our leader wishes for peace."

"Heh, is that so?"

"It is."

"Then, deliver this to your leader."

"What is it?"

At that, Riphal smiled and placed a hand on the cursed, black sword at his side. However, as expected, he couldn't feel the sensation of grasping that sword. Even though his hand moved, he couldn't feel its touch.

Nevertheless, as he touched the sword, he spoke.

"If you're that confident in yourself, then shall we exchange fire? Until the body of either is destroyed, let's strike at each other with our power. I still have my right eye. Both of my arms. My left leg. Until I reach the end of my life, I'll release my power. What about you? The power of you, who didn't pursue us, that appears to be the same as mine—how many shots can you fire at once? Though I don't know that... shall we put it to the test?"

Riphal said.

And he stared at Relca. He understood that she would say nothing. She was only the messenger. That was why he smiled at her, and,

"And so on and so forth. Sorry for saying something threatening like that. You can return now. Tell him that we'll participate in this treaty."

"... However, what you said just now..."

"And tell him that on top of that."

"....."

"Then, Lir, Sui, Kuu—take her outside."

Lir nodded at that, and then, with Relca, exited the church.

After confirming that, Riphal turned to look at Rize, and,

"Hey, Rize."

"What is it?"

"She was a beauty, wasn't she?"

"And yet that isn't what you honestly want to be talking about."

"Riiight, but still,"

Riphal said, and after laughing, he held up his hand that had been on Glovil and waved it at Rize for him to take a look.

"This hand doesn't feel aaanything, y'know."

In response, Rize looked his way, and said,

"Your sense of touch is?"

"Yeah. Even if I injure it, I don't feel any pain. So, if I happen to get injured and I don't notice—"

"... I'll cover you."

"I'll be counting on you."

At that, Rize was silent for a while, before—

"Riphal."

"Hmmmm?"

"When it comes to sacrifices, only you..."

As he said such a thing, Riphal interrupted him and spoke.

"You're wrong, Rize."

"....."

"You're wrong."

With a sad expression, Rize said nothing.

Riphal smiled at that. He looked at the face of his childhood friend. He thought of the faces of Lir, Sui, and Kuu who had just exited the church.

Thinking of his allies' faces, he smiled.

His allies here, everyone—they'd all paid heavy sacrifices.

Even Rize, as he made irritating expressions and laughed frivolously, for the sake of awakening this sword, he'd already

sacrificed his family.

And even though he'd paid such a large sacrifice, they still weren't able to smoothly advance forward.

They weren't able to advance forward at all.

There was the peace treaty.

In spite of being the mad Demon King, he called for a peace treaty.

"... Hey, Rize."

He said again.

In response, his sarcastic childhood friend looked his way, and,

"What is it?"

He replied.

To that, Riphal asked,

"Can I win?"

"....."

"Against the **Demon King**. Against the **Goddesses**. Against the **Hero**, can I win?"

"....."

"If, by any chance, I fall before then..."

However, Rize then spoke.

"Lir, you, and I... whenever we got into fights, was there a time when you lost?"

Staring at Rize,

"Never,"

Riphal said.

Rize smiled at that.

"Then, this time, you'll surely win."

He said such a thing.

He said it so easily.

Even though it wasn't so simple and he couldn't know, Rize, who was the brightest between the three of them, said that so easily.

At that,

"That's right, huh?"

Riphal said, nodding.

Then Rize—

"Well, the worst case scenario for you, Riphal, would be if all that remained of you was between your legs..."

"Die."

"I'm covering you."

"Like I said, you need to die."

"Ahaha."

Rize laughed.

Riphal laughed at that as well.

Then, looking outside the church window,

"Well, though it's not a situation where we should be laughing... the soldiers?"

"Half of them deserted."

"The remainder?"

"If we tell them that we're participating in the peace treaty, they should calm down somewhat."

"But we're going to betray it immediately, right?"

"We'll deal with it when the time comes. Now, shall we get moving?"

Saying that, Rize turned on his heel.

He exited the church.

After watching him leave, Riphal stared at the palm of his hand one more time. He stared at his palm that felt nothing.

Dried blood clung to his palm.

Staring at that blood,

"... A peace treaty, huh?"

Riphal muttered once more.

Chapter 4: Bewitching

In this world, where was the most dangerous place?

If you were to ask someone that, then surely, this is how they would answer.

"... Right next to a hysterical girl holding a whip, right~?"

Vois Fiurelle muttered, smiling.

Pretty black hair, black eyes in which intelligence seemed to lurk. Donned in miko garb, he was a boy who seemed to be around thirteen, fourteen years old.

If it was him, he should've been surrounded by his guards as usual; however, right now, he stood there alone.

He was in a small country a bit to the west of the Geihlficlant Empire, at an abandoned building in Eidolwo's outskirts.

Though it seemed to have been a fortress or some such before, it was now miserably in ruins and had become a mountain of rubble.

Staring at that rubble,

"... It's good camoflauge, isn't it? There's a hallucination barrier stretched around it, right? Though there should certainly be **Rhule Fragmei** like that... I can't dispel it. Now, what should I do?"

Vois said, taking a step forward.

He moved to touch the broken-down gates that already seemed as if they couldn't open anymore.

Then,

"... Halt,"

A voice from beyond the gate spoke. To the voice that came from the ruins that shouldn't have been in use any longer, Vois smiled and unsurprisingly continued to move forward as he said,

"Haha, I'm the sort of person who only wants to do something even

more when told not to."

"If you don't halt, then I'll kill you."

"A cute child like me?"

"I really will kill you?"

"I would rather not be killed."

"Then halt..."

However, to the place that appeared to be seeing the broken gate, Vois pressed down on his head.

Somehow, in his head, the gate easily slipped away.

Completely like some sort of mist, the gate disappeared, and where that mist faded, a different sight spread out.

Though, with that said, there was, unsurprisingly, a gate there.

Where the mist was, there was a small, prison-like fortress. And keeping watch over that gate were soldiers, dressed in a red uniform.

There were four soldiers.

Even for Vois, who didn't pride himself in combat, he could tell that each of them was overwhelmingly stronger than him just by looking.

"After all, I don't have such charming abs~"

While saying that, he cheerfully moved towards the soldiers.

From within the soldiers, one person withdrew their sword. Pointing it towards him,

"Even though you were told to halt, why have you not?"

They asked.

In response, boldly sticking out his chest, Vois spoke.

"Because I'm a peeping tom."

"Enough with the jokes! Those who know of this place's secret are

not to return ali..."

Interrupting the soldier who was saying such nonsense, Vois said,

"There's no point in killing me. All of my allies know that I'm here. This is the fortress of the **Azure Princess Mercenaries**, correct? I've come because I was called by the queen."

At that, the soldier's expression changed slightly. Glaring down at him,

"... You were called by the Princess[1]?"

"Yes. In other words, I'm an important guest, an important guest. Pointing your sword at such an important guest..."

Vois began, but then the soldier spoke.

"We have not received any instructions on a guest arriving. At the very least, we weren't told of a brat like you coming."

"Is that so?"

"It is."

"Well, that's how it is. I wasn't actually called."

"... You bastard—"

"But if you were to tell her that I've come, I believe Pia Varliere would like to meet with me, you know. If you were to kill me here, you would be punished?"

"....."

"Now, now, don't make such a tense face, and please tell your boss that Vois Fiurelle is here. Then the situation will change somewhat..."

However, the soldier then swung their sword. They moved to swing it down at him. It seemed they didn't want to listen to him at all.

Perhaps Pia Varliere had given the guards this order regarding anyone who tried to enter the fortress.

Kill any intruders.

The soldiers acted faithfully according to that order.

Regarding that.

"....."

Vois did nothing, however.

Or rather, if he tried to start a fight, he likely wouldn't be able to meet with Pia Varliere any longer.

It would be simple to kill the soldiers and intrude.

It would be enough if he carried **Rhule Fragmei** that possessed the power for that.

But he did no such thing.

It was necessary to show that he was willing to put his life in danger in order to meet with the leader of **Azure Princess** face-to-face.

Though it was necessary to show his disposition to the fickle Princess—regarding that,

"... This is a risky gamble, isn't it?"

Vois muttered, smiling in a troubled manner.

Then, the sword swung down.

If it hit him with the blade edge, he would die.

However, if by any chance Pia Varliere was watching the situation, if she was using an observation **Rhule Fragmei**—

"....."

Then, the sword hit Vois's neck.

And his consciousness easily disappeared.

♦

Some time later.

Vois Fiurelle awakened.

It seemed that water had been splashed on him to wake him up after he'd been forcibly rendered unconscious.

At that, he opened his eyes, and then felt a severe pain at his neck.

"Oh~, they didn't cut my neck. It seems my gamble worked out, hmm?"

He said in a carefree voice.

Then he got up.

He looked around.

He was in a room with a red rug spread across the floor.

In the center was a throne of some sort, and there, donned in a beautiful blue dress, a women sat.

The queen of the **Azure Princess Mercenaries**, Pia Varliere.

A well-arranged face, unyielding red eyes.

Long, seemingly-impossible azure hair that marked her as a bearer of the **Congenital Magic Abnormality**.

Incidentally, those who possessed the **Congenital Magic Abnormality**, in order to wield an incredibly large amount of magic power, were unable to control their emotions—that was how it was supposed to be, but she gazed at him with alluring eyes with intelligence.

Staring at that Pia, Vois spoke.

"Ah, my lady. I'm a slave to those charming red eyes of yours."

As a beautiful smile arose in her face,

"Everyone says the same."

"Because it's true."

"However, seeing as how you are the enemy, you aren't exactly a slave~"

"That's not true~"

"Or better said, I have no interest in a brat like you."

However, Vois smiled at that, and,

"Same as always. Truly, you wouldn't kill me, with this young, desirable body..."

He began, but then his words stopped.

Because suddenly, an intense pain ran through his right shoulder.

In response, Vois looked at his right shoulder. There, from some point ago, a knife was buried deeply in it.

Though Pia, seated on the throne, hadn't appeared to move, she'd thrown the knife at some point, with it now pierced through Vois's shoulder.

While desperately trying to endure the pain, Vois smiled.

"... S-Suddenly going with the SM play, the Queen is quite assertive..."

He began, but then he stopped again.

This time, it was the top of his right foot through which pain erupted. The knife was sticking his foot to the floor.

As expected, Pia hadn't appeared to move.

"....."

Vois became quiet at that.

Then, Pia spoke.

"I despise such vulgar words."

"... But that's simply how I am."

"Your point is?"

Pia said.

Seated on the throne, she spoke with a bored expression.

He didn't feel any killing intent.

He didn't feel any indications of movement when she attacked.

Regarding that, Vois again thought.

In this world, where was the most dangerous place?

To that,

"... Right next to a hysterical girl holding a knife～"

He said quietly.

Pia tilted her head slightly to one side.

"What was that?"

Vois smiled at that and answered,

"No, just a bit of a personal joke."

"That's enough of that. A child shouldn't be thinking about such indecent things～"

"My apologies."

"Then, will you hurry up and talk?"

"... The knives?"

Pia cheerfully laughed with a *fufufu* at that.

"They're staying in～. You have perhaps fifteen minutes before you die of blood loss. So, to keep this brief and concise, please answer my questions. Ah, incidentally, if I don't like your response, I intend to throw the next knife at your heart."

She said such a thing.

Taking complete control of the situation, she said that.

At that, Vois made a troubled face, and,

"Though I was already aware of this before coming here, I really have to be prepared to risk my life, don't I?"

He said, to which Pia spoke.

"So, why have you come to such a place? Have you come to be on

good terms with us?"

"No."

"Then why have you come?"

"To negotiate with you."

Pia laughed at that.

"Don't tell me you've come to have us participate in that ban on **Rhule Fragmei** that's currently causing a fuss all over the world?"

Vois shook his head at those words.

"No,"

He said.

"In that case, what have you come for?"

To that, Vois anwered,

"To implore something of you."

"Of me?"

"If I were to be precise, I've come to scout the **Azure Princess**."

"Ehh. Is it your leader that wants to call for us?"

At the question, Vois became tense.

Pia had said that if she didn't like his response, she would throw a knife through his heart.

And he didn't believe that to be an empty threat. She'd calmly throw the knife and kill him.

In other words, if there was a breakdown in negotiations, his life would end.

While smiling wryly to the stinging sensation,

"No,"

Vois said.

While thinking about the possibility of a knife flying in that instant, he said that.

At any rate, the other party was a **Congenital Magic Abnormality** bearer who was unable to control her emotions. If it was something she disliked, there was a chance she'd immediately become enraged and throw knives around.

Then, at that moment,

"Heh, you're unexpectedly brave,"

She said such a thing.

Vois shrugged his shoulders that were hurting from the knife stuck in one.

"I'm honoured to be praised by you."

"So? Are you saying that you've become subordinate to me?"

"Yes."

"By your subordinates?"

However, Vois unsurprisingly shook his head at that.

"The organization of which I am a part of..."

He began, but then a shock hit his body. This time it was his left shoulder. Again, a knife had been pierced through it at some point, as it seemed that Vois had picked a fight.

At that, Pia spoke.

"I dislike lies. The People's Republic of Sphelliyet is your organization, is it not? Ryner is nothing more than your puppet king. Exactly what do you intend to do with my adorable Ryner-chan?"

Despite the question, Vois appeared to black out and thus couldn't answer. To begin with, he wasn't that strong against pain. As a member of a swindler family, his grandmother had told to never be in a situation where he would get injured...

Then,

"Are you listening?"

Vois shook his head at that. To clear his head that was hazy from the bleeding, he bit his tongue.

His tongue hurt.

Ah, honestly, I hate getting hurt, he thought.

Like that, he lifted his head and stared at Pia as he spoke.

"... It seems that I don't have much time left..."

"My, but it hasn't even been five minutes."

"... My constitution... isn't that good～"

"Ahaha, then you'll die here, it seems."

Vois was about to make a light-hearted comment to that; however, his head wasn't working very well. Strength steadily leaving his body, he understood that he really was nearly out of time.

And perhaps that was Pia's aim. That she'd never intended to pointlessly bargain.

But Vois was the same as well.

That was why he desperately tried to open his eyes, which were constantly trying to close, as he stared at Pia and spoke.

"... Rather than send a subordinate, I personally came here and risked my life, as you are especially important to us."

To such words, Pia said,

"Even if you didn't say so, I know better than anyone else how important I am. Therefore, I would appreciate it if you said something more truthful."

"... I've sent subordinates to Roland and to Gastark as well. However, for you, it was necessary that I myself come."

"Correct. And? Are you're saying that because the almighty you personally came here, I should be proud?"

To the question, he tried to open his mouth to speak, but the

strength left his foot. He fell to his knees.

Regarding that,

"Is it over already?"

Pia said, but he shook his head. As he desperately tried to stare intently at her, a smile broke out across his face.

"... Is there a man in this world who would stop speaking with such a beautiful woman before him?"

"Aha, so you can still talk like that. So?"

"... So... I have a question to ask you."

"What is it?"

"What is it that you're fighting with?"

At that, Pia's expression changed only slightly. Her face becoming a bit more serious, she looked at him.

"What about you?"

"... It's rude to respond with a question."

"But it allows me to seize control of the situation."

"... Yes, that's true."

"And I am beautiful, am I not?"

She said something like that with such self-confidence.

She said that with an expression that suggested that if you were beautiful, then it was fine no matter what you did.

And Vois, at some point, started thinking that it might be fun to surrender to her self-confident expression.

But, as that was impossible right now, he smiled weakly, and,

"... Ahaha, that's certainly true... then, I'll answer first."

After saying that, he stopped his words again.

As expected, his body was losing its strength, and his consciousness

was leaving him. With his strength to speak also fading, the idea of speaking to Pia Varliere in such a tone made him slightly uneasy, but nevertheless he mustered up his strength, and,

"... I... am fighting with the fate of this world,"

He said.

At that, Pia's eyes widened slightly.

"Ehh,"

She leaked out.

Then, as a somewhat sarcastic smile arose in her face,

"You, the Goddesses' underling, are fighting with the fate of the world?"

"... Ah, as I thought, that much..."

"That's why we wanted you dead, you see? After all, you are the enemy of humanity. But..."

Pia said.

And looking down at Vois's feet, she—

"Why are those monsters not revealing themselves? Even when their underling is on the verge of death, they won't come out? Even though I went through such pains to prepare **Rhule Fragmei** to kill the **Goddesses**... could it be that you're disliked by the Goddesses?"

To the question, Vois responded with a laugh.

"To tell the truth, I tried to look under the Goddesses' skirts, so they called me a pervert~ and got mad at me."

However, despite the pointless joke, Pia didn't throw a knife.

She already knew that Vois couldn't endure any more.

At that, he smiled, and,

"Ah, I'm glad. Are you allowing my jokes now?"

"Even if I leave you alone, you'll die at any rate, won't you?"

"I'm someone who'll die if I'm not allowed to say perverted things."

"Aren't you a fool?"

"Yes, that's correct. You put it well,"

He said, smiling weakly.

However, he wasn't sure if his face was capable of smiling properly anymore.

Already, he truly didn't have any time left.

That was why he continued.

"... I had no intention of becoming the Goddesses' underling from the beginning."

"It doesn't look that way to me, though?"

"... Then if I say this, will you believe me? I despise being used by other people."

A smile spread across Pia's face at that, and,

"And that's why you're becoming subordinate to me?"

"You and I are the same, aren't we? To ourselves, the most..."

"Correct."

"That's why I've come to ask you to lend your power. I want you to work together as a united front."

"With you?"

"No, with the Demon King Ryner Lute."

At that, Pia's expression became slightly threatening.

"... Those rumours that you're circulating—how much of it is the truth? Ryner is..."

However, interrupting her, Vois spoke.

"The strength to explain that..."

"I would appreciate it if you talked."

"... It's true. Ryner-san, of his own will, killed countless people."

"Ha. Have you come here to tell lies? Ryner wouldn't..."

"But right now, I didn't come here to talk about..."

"Hold on, my topic..."

However, interrupting that, Vois continued.

Already, he was becoming unable to hear her voice. Thus, he continued. Though it was possible that he was getting on her nerves and would be killed, he didn't have any time.

It wasn't just him that had no time.

He wouldn't allow where the time of the world was slowly headed.

That was why he knowingly put his life at risk and came here.

After all, the clock was already moving.

After all, the demon awakened, and in the instant the country was established, every cogwheel had begun to move.

That was why Vois spoke.

"... Already, several countries are approving of the ban on **Rhule Fragmei**. From now on, **Rhule Fragmei** won't be used in wars, and instead people will kill one another directly in ordinary wars."

"....."

"... But your group isn't a country. You aren't participating in the peace treaty. Therefore, for a while, even if you use **Rhule Fragmei**, no one will be able to criticize you."

"....."

"... And so, using that power, please steal as much as territory as you can. Afraid to violate the treaty, the other party won't use any **Rhule Fragmei**."

"....."

"... Though before long, the world will join forces and rise up against your group..."

Then, his words stopped there.

Because he suddenly started regaining consciousness. What was happening, he understood. It was likely that **Derunio** was being used.

A **Rhule Fragmei** that, by absorbing blood, allowed wounds to regenerate.

Though it was being pressed against his face, he saw.

The one pressing it against him was Pia Varliere. Furthermore, for some reason, her face was drawing closer to Vois's.

That pretty face of hers—

"Have you regained consciousness?"

She asked, to which he stuck his tongue out, and,

"With the lady's kiss, my consciousness..."

"Idi~ot,"

She said, removing **Derunio** from him.

As the pain returned to his body,

"Guah,"

He moaned.

And then, even as he collapsed onto the bright red rug, he noticed it.

"Even if it's you, talking while collapsed alone, you can't be heard."

"... Ohh, did I collapse?"

"With that degree of injuries after ten minutes—what a weakling."

"Haha, I did say that I have a weak constitution, didn't I? However, thanks to that, I became acquainted with you. The way Pia-san thinks, a good scent..."

Then his face was kicked.

"Kyaun! ♡"

He cried out, but his ability to joke around like that had yet to return to his body.

His shoulders and right foot weren't yet healed. They continued to bleed. Rather, the knives were still lodged in them.

Left alone like this, he'd likely lose consciousness again.

At that,

"... Then, where was I?"

Vois asked, to which Pia replied,

"You can't use **Rhule Fragmei**, and during the time in which you'll deceive the world for a just cause, we are to attack other countries. So, as you claim to follow the fate of the world and such to the end, we are to merge the land we conquered, correct?"

At such words, a smile arose in Vois's face as he spoke.

"Even though I didn't say it myself, my message was delivered quite clearly... then, what do you think? Do you not believe it to be a good idea?"

He began, but then she shook her head.

"I don't. Or rather, in the first place, I don't believe that you established this peace treaty of yours well enough? Roland has already upset it."

To those words, he said,

"Ah, what Roland is desperately circulating—that our purpose for suggesting this peace treaty is to aim at Sion Astal's life... those rumours?"

"Correct. Because of those rumours, the countries of this world have begun to doubt you."

She began, but Vois smiled at that.

"It's not quite doubt. After all, they never had faith to begin with."

"At the very least, Roland already..."

However, interrupting that, Vois spoke.

"I didn't expect that mad country to participate in the treaty to begin with. No, from the start, I've been desperately stringing along a plot in order to oppose that country... Naturally, we will be a hindrance to them."

"In order to oppose Roland?"

Vois nodded at that.

"Your group should already be aware, correct? You should know of that country's abnormality. Furthermore, as people from Roland, you've always been investigating it."

"....."

"The mad hero of the south. The cursed sword of the north. The Goddesses of the west—and then the atypical god that's descended upon the Remrus Empire. Each of them clearly isn't human. That's why, to this world..."

"Because it's in the hand of these monsters, we should place it back in the hands of humanity?"

To those words,

"Correct,"

Vois said, nodding.

At that, with an expression as if he were an idiot, Pia laughed, and,

"I would expect nothing else from a brat like you. What a knight in shining armour."

To such words, Vois spoke.

"Haha, knight... knight? Well, at the very least, when it comes to my own life, all that I do is just. Of course, though, once we slaughter all the monsters, I intend to reign over all of humanity..."

"Then, I shall reign over that."

"That's fine. But when the time comes to ride on top of me, if you could ride from my chest to my bottom..."

However, interrupting that,

"I'll ride by the heels,"

She said, as a bewitching smile spread across her face.

Vois nodded at that.

"That's also fine~"

"Everyone says the same."

"Ahaha, then an alliance with us..."

In response, she nodded.

"Very well. The **Goddesses** didn't come to save you when you were on the brink of death. You've been discarded, it seems. In that case, if you've been discarded, then you can be used. Of course, you shall be a slave, and I, your master."

"That's fine with me~. I like being used by a beauty,"

Vois replied, and mentally, added another thing.

That in the end, this beauty who thought she could use him would be the one to cry, and that would be the greatest excitement.

But at that, she suddenly stared at him with cold eyes.

"....."

However, she said nothing.

In response, Vois tilted his head to one side and stared back.

"What is it?"

A cold smile floated onto her face, as she said,

"But this plan—I can do it without you, can't I? If, like this, I choose to kill you by not granting you treatment, I can simply form an alliance with Ryner, can't I?"

Vois easily nodded at that.

"Yes, that's possible."

"Then, what reason do I have to let you live?"

"If you kill me, you'll be hated by Ryner-san?"

"Haha, then I'll keep it a secret."

"My subordinates will tell him."

"If you're talking about your subordinates outside the fortress, they've already been captured, though?"

"I didn't bring along my messenger."

At those words, Pia laughed cheerfully.

"Aha, you're desperate right now, aren't you?"

"....."

"Because you're desperate, you're willing to risk your life. Then, by all means, for our help..."

However, Vois then spoke.

"All this time, I've successfully played the part of the **Goddesses**' manservant. Because of that, I possess far more information than you. For example, the way to stop Sion Astal—the **Fallen Mad Hero** [Asruld Roland]..."

He began, but unsurprisingly, Pia smiled and spoke.

"We'll get what you know out of you through torture."

"But you won't do that. You can't kill me, who's still useful with my skill."

"Aha—useful? Skill?"

Vois nodded at that.

"Yes, and what's more, I'm loveable and adorable."

"What a joke."

"So, you won't kill the adorable me. After all, you're someone who'll use me if I can be used. Am I wrong?"

In response, Pia stared at him for a while, and then tossed **Derunio** at him.

Vois caught it.

Immediately, **Derunio** activated its power.

It absorbed the blood.

It absorbed the blood that had soaked into the rug at his feet. As **Derunio** wasn't something that absorbed the other party's blood, the blood currently being absorbed wasn't the blood streaming from Vois.

It was someone else's blood.

He didn't know whether the source of the blood was still alive or had been killed; however, thanks to that blood, Vois's injuries were rapidly mending. Confirming that, he took out the knives in his shoulders and foot. Then, those wounds healed. The pain also became no more.

Vois lifted his head at that, and,

"Has our alliance been established, then?"

He asked that.

She nodded, and said,

"Yes, but it's not because you're useful that I'm letting you live."

"Then why?"

At that, a smile broke out across her face, as she spoke.

"Because I can kill you at any time."

"....."

"And because I can kill you at any time, I won't kill you now."

"How frighteniiing."

"Correct. I *am* frightening. Remember that."

"Haha. But I already knew that before I came here."

"My, is that so?"

She said, cackling.

Vois also smiled at that.

With this, the alliance was established.

Nevertheless, however, there was no time.

And Pia seemed to understand that as well, as she spoke.

"Then, let's hear about why you're in such a hurry. It's only been ten days since the war with Gastark. Even though you recently established the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, what's your reason for coming here in such a rush? Of course, if it's expanding dominion in one move through **Rhule Fragmei**, I believe that now is the only time... but if it's about that, then it seems a bit too forcible. Why were you willing to risk your life to come to us? For what reason are you in such a hurry?"

In response to such a question, Vois contemplated. *Where should I start?* he asked himself as thoughts whirled around in his head.

As for why he had to move in such a rush, there were numerous reasons.

He could think of many reasons.

But one reason was especially urgent and so came to mind.

Staring at Pia Varliere,

"You hail from Roland, correct?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever met the present king—Sion Astal?"

"I haven't. But Zohra... my subordinate seems to have met him."

"Then, what did that subordinate say?"

He asked, to which Pia made a slightly thoughtful expression, and then,

"That he's gone completely mad."

"Haha, that's true. After all, he's no longer human. And out of all the monsters running rampant in the Menoris continent, he's the worst of them. He's to the point where the **Goddesses** fear him. The

Goddesses say that as he expands his territory, his power grows."

At that, Pia made a puzzled expression as she looked his way and spoke.

"Haa? Of course, if he expands his territory, his country becomes stronger..."

She began, but interrupting that, Vois spoke.

"That isn't what I mean. What I meant was that Sion Astal's individual power increases. The humans that dwell in the lands he reigns over will be rewritten into a separate existence, from **Human** to **Human α**. Furthermore, he does it unconsciously. As every human who looks up to Sion Astal as their king is recomposed into a separate existence, the source of Sion Astal's power will be transfigured."

"... Now, hold on for a moment. Saying that..."

However, without letting Pia finish, Vois said,

"Even if you wish to hear the detailed version, I can't tell you anything beyond the hearsay from the **Goddesses**... However, the **Goddesses** are very impatient. I understand that the **Hero**'s power, having already taken control of the southern continent and entered the central continent, has grown to the point where it seems the **Goddesses** won't extend a hand. That is to say, if we wish to kill him..."

"... It'll have to be while he's within the southern continent, is what you're saying?"

Vois nodded at that, and,

"Well, I can't say how strong the power of the Demon King is either~. As the **Goddesses** also fear the power of the **Demon**, even if the **Hero** comes to the central continent, there might still be a way. But..."

Vois said.

Then he turned around.

He looked towards the entrance of the room. If that direction was the south, he wasn't entirely sure, but at any rate he figured it was,

and so looked that way.

He looked towards where the **Fallen Mad Hero** was.

And then, thinking of the face of the eternally sleepy-looking, afternoon naps-loving man who had become his tentative ally, if one could call it that,

"... But because the **Demon** can't help but like the **Hero**, Ryner-san might not lend a hand. Therefore, I'd like it if we could deal with it ourselves as much as possible,"

He said.

Regarding that, if they didn't need to rely on the power of a monster, then, as much as possible, he didn't want to depend on it.

*The **Goddesses** are too arrogant—**Humans** are nothing more than magic created by them merely for the purpose of sealing away the **Hero**? Don't make me laugh,* he thought.

The ones filling this continent now are us humans, he thought.

Well, saying that they walk a hundred steps but give in[2], truly the **Goddesses** were the founders of humans, so what should they do?

Saying that they were born for nothing, that they were scrap who were forced to have no reason to live.

At any time, in a person's life, the outcome of the dice they cast could change with just one thing.

One word.

One lie.

With one smile in a day, everything could suddenly change.

And surely, that was the same for the lives of those monsters as well.

That was why they cast the dice.

They'll fall to my feet, and until the roll in which they cry out appears, I'll continue to cast the dice.

For that sake,

"Now, Pia-san, please lend me your assistance. Together, we'll take back the future of humanity from those monsters,"

He said.

Pia replied,

"For the sake of the world in which I shall rule over?"

If only I could vomit at those words—while thinking that,

"Yes, for the sake of the world in which you shall rule over,"

Vois smiled with an innocent face.

Translator's Notes

1. ↑ The kanji used here is 女王, which means "queen", but the reading (i.e. what is actually being said) is "princess". Essentially, she's queen in authority but her exact title is Princess.
2. ↑ This is a saying that essentially means, "they act unwilling but ultimately give in."

Chapter 5: Reunion

The sun was going down.

Clouds that were dyed red from that evening sun slowly drifted in the sky.

While staring at those clouds that seemed determined to airily float by,

"Ah~, my ass hurts,"

Ryner groaned.

Having continued to gallop on his horse since morning, changing once midway and then continuing to gallop, it was expected that his bottom would already reach its limit, and so he fell and was now, still straddling his horse, toppled over and staring up at the sky.

Nevertheless, the horse steadily continued to move forward, despite the shock on its back.

While staring up at the sky with exhausted eyes,

"... I wanna be that cloud."

Ryner said such an idiotic thing.

In response, riding the horse parallel to his,

"Which cloud?"

Ferris asked, to which Ryner replied,

"That cloud."

"Which one? That dango-shaped one?"

"Huh~?"

After searching for a dango-ish shaped cloud, Ryner said,

"Um, what? While I have no clue what dango-shaped cloud you're

thinking of—well, it's that one."

"Mm-hmm. Somehow, it seems promising."

"Right? My dream is to be a cloud, floating around without a care in the world."

"And without any usefulness whatsoever."

"Is that what you think?"

At that, Ferris laughed with a *fufu*.

Though what kind of expression she was making as she laughed, Ryner, who was collapsed and staring up at the sky, didn't know.

Then, riding on his opposite side,

"... Pretty."

Kiefer said.

At that, Ryner asked,

"The sunset?"

"Nope."

"Then, the clouds?"

"Wroooong."

"Then what's pretty?"

He asked, to which she replied,

"Ryner's eyes."

"Huh."

"The sun's reflected in them."

Saying such things cheerfully, she leaned forward slightly and peered at his face.

Kiefer's face took over Ryner's entire line of sight. Her red hair was dyed further red by the sunset.

At that, Ryner said,

"Kiefer."

"Hmm?"

"If you lean forward like that, aren't you gonna fall off?"

"If I fall, will you save me?"

"Saving you would be bothersome, so I'd just sit up properly."

"Ahaha,"

She laughed cheerfully. Then she stared further into his eyes.

"....."

However, she said nothing.

But he knew what she was looking for.

The five-star pentacle.

Up until recently, it should've been a five-star pentacle.

She was looking for what had already disappeared from his eyes.

And her expression became slightly worried. Upon noticing that, she made such a face.

Nevertheless, she said nothing. Merely staring at him, she said nothing.

"I said I'd sit up."

As he said that, she again laughed, and,

"Even though your butt hurts～"

"Yeah, so I'd stand?"

"Right, right. Like Ferris?"

She said, to which Ryner—

"Ferris?"

He said, looking her way again.

There, so that her bottom was raised above the horse, she was standing with one leg placed on the horse's back, as ridiculous as it was.

Rather than say something about how she was going to fall like that, or how it was dangerous,

"Is that some kind of acrobatics training?"

Ryner quipped, to which she looked down at him, and then suddenly,

"It's training to plant my heel against your face!"

She said, swinging a leg down at him.

At that,

"Whoa—"

Ryner said, sitting up to dodge. Ferris's heel struck the rear end of the horse. Letting out a neigh, the horse vigorously galloped forward, the movement of which was causing its back to collide with Ryner's rear end repeatedly.

"O-Ow, owww! Hey, just wait a bit~. It's okay, so whoa, whoa,"

Ryner said, soothing the horse.

Then he turned his head.

At Kiefer, who was in a half-bent position, standing with the stirrup, and at the ridiculous-looking Ferris, who was unsurprisingly standing on her horse one-legged.

He wanted to say something like that, *"I'm gonna send you flying~,"*

"... But I don't have the energy to cry out~,"

He said wearily.

And he looked.

He looked at the setting sun behind them.

By the way, they were currently on a large, considerably well-maintained road.

This road led to the fourth largest city of the ex-Geihlficlant Empire, so many people came through it.

Embarrassingly enough, already, numerous horses and carriages had noticed Ferris, standing on top of her horse.

"... It really is a big city, huh?"

He said.

Then he looked in front of him again. He looked towards the destination of the road. Kiefer had said that they should be able to arrive by evening, and that didn't seem to be false.

Already, the entrance of Sphellilans--no, the entrance of the city that had become the People's Republic of Sphelliyet could be seen.

As they'd been told by Kiefer along the way, it seemed that this city, for a long time in the Geihlficlant Empire, had been a site of heavy trading between the north and south, and so to have it stolen was likely a significant blow to the Geihlficlant Empire.

And sure enough, right now, there were carriages stacked with large burdens constantly passing by on this road.

Though he didn't know where those carriages came from,

"... Even though it was just captured, trading can resume so easily, huh?"

He muttered.

Then, after closing his eyes for a moment, he re-opened them.

In the center of his eyes, a tear shape of iridescent light arose, and with those eyes, he gazed at the entire street.

With those eyes, he saw the deployed Magic Knights of the town and the locations of their **Rhule Fragmei**.

Of course, he couldn't see what kind of power they had if they weren't being activated; however, throughout the entire town, several magic traps had been concealed and offensive spells had been prepared.

"Ah, so we really are preparing for war... Well, that's how it is. After all, we still don't know when Geihlficlant's gonna try and take back this place..."

Regarding the carriages that seemed to move back and forth in a hurry,

"... They're carriages under Vois's patronage, right? Transporting military goods?"

Ryner said, as the pattern in his eyes vanished, looking at the carriages with his sleepy expression once more.

Then, Kiefer and Ferris caught up with him.

Maybe because of their smaller bodies, their bottoms didn't protest as much, but they were sitting upright on their horses.

Ferris asked,

"What are you looking at?"

Ryner answered,

"The carriages."

Then Kiefer said,

"Vois-kun's... the Anti-Roland Coalition's carriages?"

"Looks like it. But, well, I didn't think that with this amount of carriages, they could investigate each one by one..."

He began, but Kiefer interrupted him, saying,

"Back when Sphelliyet was a town of Geihlficlant, there were three times as many carriages, and they properly examined each and everyone of them, it seems?"

At such words, Ryner made an amazed face as he looked at her. And,

"Seriously? What a city, huh~?"

He said.

Kiefer laughed, and,

"You know, our previous home of Roland altogether is only a bit bigger than Sphelliyet—that's how big this city is?"

"... Wait, what? This city is that huge?"

"Yup."

"And Vois managed to steal it?"

"Impressive, isn't it?"

"No, calling it impressive..."

Well, in this situation, that wouldn't have been possible without using ***Rhule Fragmei***—thinking that, he again looked towards the city.

And he contemplated.

About how three times this many carriages would come through this city.

In other words,

"... Right now, in order to enter the city, there's defnitely an inspection, right?"

Kiefer nodded.

"It seems so. Even though the soldiers and people of Sphelliyet surrendered, there's still a chance that there might be a civil war."

"And if they could get in touch with Geihlficlant's other cities, they'd come up with a plan to kill Vois?"

"Right, right,"

Kiefer said, nodding.

However, just then, Ferris looked towards Ryner and spoke.

"Perhaps it'd be a plan to kill you."

"Ah, right, I'm this country's king, aren't I? But then why would we be so sneaky about it?"

"Out of a guilty conscience?"

"Guilty about what?"

Again, she randomly blushed, and,

"Sneaking into a person's tent in the middle of the night..."

To such things, Ryner asked,

"Even though you've mentioning that since this morning, what's all this about a tent anyway?"

"This conversation."

"Haa?

"Anyhow, the point is that you're a guilty person!"

While it made no sense, Ryner nodded at that.

"Well, there's definitely something to feel guilty over. I mean, we've come to destroy all of the authority Vois's built for himself all sneaky-like... Though Vois is definitely expecting us to do this... It's gonna be tricky dealing with that guy's pointlessly sharp head,"

He said, before looking once more at the town.

Already, he could begin to see the town's large gate and several hundreds of armed soldiers.

The soldiers were dressed in a black uniform.

It was the uniform that Vois supplied to the Anti-Roland Coalition soldiers.

Looking at that,

"Ah, this really has become Vois's country, huh?"

He muttered.

Furthermore, he could see that every carriage was being carefully inspected.

"Ahhh, it looks like it really won't be easy getting into the town, doesn't it?"

Then,

"Mm-hmm. But for someone who goes around sneaking into

women's rooms while in the nude, going *uhuehue*, isn't this your strong suit?"

Ferris said such a thing.

In response, Ryner looked at Ferris with half-closed eyes.

"I'm too tired to even start with what's wrong about tha..."

"*Uhuehue~, by taking off my clothes, I've become invisible~*"

"No, that's why—"

"*Kyaa, he's suddenly become invisible, this perveeert!*"

"Um..."

"That's why you have to take off your clothes, Ryner. And then, like you've always done it, strike the town in the nude!"

Ferris said, raising both hands. She moved the horse in his direction.

Her eyes were earnest.

Though she was the sort of person who always acted serious about these things.

Like that, she moved to take off Ryner's clothes.

"Haaaaaaaaa? Wait, you, this isn't the time to screw around... Hey, Kiefer, tell her that now's not the time for this..."

Ryner began, before suddenly stopping.

For some reason, Kiefer's eyes were also cheerful as she raised both hands and moved to take off his clothes.

"Traitooooooooooooor!?"

Ryner exclaimed.

At the same time he cried out, he noticed something strange.

It was a sign.

As they approached the city, he noticed several signs.

At that,

"Ah, wait, time out,"

Ryner said.

In response, while raising both hands,

"Uhuehuehue, miss, you can no longer escape—"

Though Ferris said that in her usual monotonous voice, Ryner pushed away her hands, and,

"No, no, look over there. At that sign."

"Sign?"

"Yeah, yeah. Isn't it about us?"

He said.

Ferris stopped her hands.

She looked at the sign.

After confirming that, Ryner also looked at the sign again.

On the first sign, this was what was written.

"In the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, everyone's daily lives will not change. On the contrary, as such a significant merchant town, it's been flourishing up until now. So relax, and please strive in your trading."

On the second sign, this was what was written.

'*"The People's Republic of Sphelliyet is a country where everyone works hard. Here, there is no such thing as social identity. If you work hard, then the happiness of simply working hard is all that you need. Now, seize your own future with your own hands!"*

The third—

"Presently, for those without work, the Fiurelle Group offers its services. The types of services vary. Depending on your talents, you can jump towards infinite possibilities."

There, Ryner grimaced.

"Hey, isn't the Fiurelle Group the swindler group Vois had back in ex-Iyet? Well, when it comes to dubious things, that guy's always been completely willi..."

He began to say, but stopped.

After all, when it came to dubious things, that guy wasn't going to *not* do anything dubious again. In that case, he'd decide to go all out when it came to such things.

No, to begin with, the fact that this country was standing here now was dubious.

"....."

However, the signs continued.

Fourth sign.

"The People's Republic of Sphelliyet is protected by the Demon King that frightened even the Geihlficlant Empire and Gastark Empire into fleeing. So relax and spend each day of your life easily. As long as the Demon King protects us, no one will have to deal with war again."

Fifth sign.

"The Demon King is admired by both men and women, up until the Fiurelle Group. The Demon King Ryner Lute is peerless. He is able to respond to everyone's requests, no matter how many. In bed, he is a challenge for everyone. Come on!"

"... I'm gonna kill him,"

Ryner said, groaning.

But at any rate, he also ignored this sign. After all, there was only one sign where it was clear from its cryptic message that it would mean nothing to anyone else.

Ryner looked at that sign.

There, this was what was written.

"This is a message for my underwear thief friend Ry~. Come to the official building of the central army. It's our headquarters. As I'm a bit busy, I likely won't be there when Ry-san arrives, so please wait there. As soon as I return, I'll clear up various misunderstandings. Incidentally, I have no intention of fighting with you. The king is you. ♡ I am your manservant. ♡ Of course, though, if you wish to fight in bed, I accept your challenge! Aha. ♡ With that, back to bed~."

While staring at such a sign, Ryner scowled until he could scowl no further, before he spoke.

"... Geez, though what's written there is a piece of shit that makes a chill run down my spine... Ah, maybe it's a message from Vois?"

As he said that, Ferris nodded with an unusually earnest face, and,

"... It can't be that he's introducing a tax system on dango... Ah, though it's simple to see..."

"Wait, heeeey, are you looking at a different sign?"

"Hmm? Aren't we talking about the sign to the left?"

"Huh? To the left?"

Ryner said, turning in that direction.

There, this sign was present.

"Ferris-saaaan, the People's Republic of Sphelliyet will be adopting a tax system on dango. If you wish to overturn this, please convince Ry-san to join me."

Such a thing was written.

To that, Ferris spoke.

"Hey, Ryner. Become Vois's ally."

"Haa? Geez, you're so easily bribed... But whatever, none of this matters!"

Ryner said, again stopping that line of thought. Then he took in a deep breath, before letting out a sigh with a *haa,* and then,

"Y'know, lately we haven't been having a lot of these stupid conversations, so it's really wearing me out now."

As he said that, Ferris nodded in agreement.

"So then, you'll become allies with Vois..."

"That's not what I'm saying at all!"

"Mm. It couldn't be that that place is the capital of dango, could it?"

"... Um..."

With exasperated eyes, Ryner looked at Ferris's sparkling expression, and then looked at Kiefer to the side, who was smiling wryly.

She smiled his way, and,

"After fighting so many battles to get here, with so many dying, this is somehow really amusing,"

She said such a thing.

In response, Ryner spoke in a weary tone.

"But I'm *tired*."

"Are you?"

"Yeah."

"But you look like you're having fun?"

At such words, Ryner groaned, saying *"Lieees."*

But,

"....."

Again, Ryner looked around at his surroundings.

He looked at the street where carriages, people, and horses passed by in a hurry.

The faces of the people walking by weren't dispirited.

Even though, as Vois conquered this place, he'd burned the

neighbouring towns and villages to ash, the people's faces weren't dispirited.

At the very least, their faces were brighter than those of the people of the previous Roland, a long time ago.

Furthermore, due to the several idiotic signs standing, this place was strangely bright, giving the illusion of peace.

It was like, back when he and Ferris were travelling to various countries on Sion's orders, the Iyet Republic.

Vois's native country.

Operated by the Fiurelle Group, it'd been lacking in laws and rules, and yet was a strangely bright country full of idiots—this place gave off the same atmosphere.

No, it seemed that Vois had purposely made it that way.

A country untouched by the horrors of war, where working hard was your sole reward.

A country of commerce with no social classes.

If that was the kind of country that Vois wanted to create, then there was no need to oppose him, but,

"But the path taken to get there was..."

Ryner murmured.

Though this country had been smoothed over with a bright surface, it was likely that within, flames of resentment and anger were smouldering.

At any rate, what with killing everyone in the surrounding towns and villages, Vois had forced this city to surrender.

Something like simply saying, *"Yes, everyone, let's work to create a bright future~"* wasn't going to happen in reality.

Well, right now, after an aggresive invasion, something like starting a revolt would be surprisingly gentle—though in spite of such things, the atmosphere was strangely bright...

"....."

However, Ryner then quit that line of thought.

And, he contemplated.

"... I really am naive, huh...?"

At the very least, the people and soldiers of Imperial Nelpha needed a place, and Vois had prepared that.

Though his means of doing so were forcible, Vois had said from the beginning that he would obtain the power to oppose Roland. And quickly, he'd established his foothold here.

And that's the difference between him and me, Ryner thought.

All words and no talk, talking about how he'd save Sion, and if Sion had gone somewhere that his hand wouldn't reach, then he'd stand beside him—that was difference between Vois and him, who said such things and yet still couldn't move forward so easily.

"Well, though using my name to his heart's content pisses me off..."

While saying that, he looked around.

He looked at the faces of the people of the country that Vois had just established.

And regarding the slightly disappointed mood that came forth,

"... Well, if things are like this right now, then we don't have to be in a rush. It seems like Vois isn't here either,"

He said.

Of course, like this, there was no way they could do as Vois said.

"Now then, what should we do?"

At that, Kiefer spoke.

"Aren't you going to do what was written on those giant signs that were there when we entered the city?"

However, with a suspicious face, Ryner said,

"No, let's not. I don't trust a single world that comes from Vois's mouth. Right, Ferris?"

In response,

"Yeah. That's correct. If the time comes when he won't safeguard a tax system that favours dango..."

Saying such a thing, she withdrew part of her sword from its sheathe.

Ryner shrugged at that, and,

"No, dango's not the point here... Seriously, there's no guarantee that they'd just be, *'Nothing'll happen, go on through～'* after we pass under the gates, right?"

He said, looking at the city gates.

Naturally, Vois knew of Ryner's power. He knew of the power of Ryner's eyes that, in the fight against Gastark, cancelled out Glouvil's own.

And as it was likely that he wanted to make use of such power, he probably wasn't going to openly a pick a fight with Ryner after witnessing it.

Then, as if she'd been thinking the same thing,

"Ryner,"

Kiefer called his name.

As he looked her way, she asked with some difficulty,

"That... power of yours."

"Yeah?"

"Is it okay if I ask a little about it?"

"Go ahead."

"That power of yours, um—Ryner, how many times..."

She began, but then Ryner shook his head.

"I won't use it."

At that, Kiefer's eyes widened. With a *I don't know how to ask this*

kind of face,

"Umm, do you not know how to use it?"

However, Ryner also shook his head at that.

"That's not it."

"Then... Then, it's because you don't want to use a power that could kill so many..."

"That's not it either,"

Ryner said, interrupting Kiefer.

"It's simple: I won't use it. I don't have the strength left for that anymore,"

He said.

And that was the truth.

Already, he no longer had the strength needed to use that power.

Because he knew the truth.

Because he knew the price that he had to pay to use that power was too great.

It seemed that if he didn't offer the life of someone important to him, he couldn't use it.

And apparently that time, it'd been his mother.

That power had been born from giving up his mother's life as a sacrifice.

And his mother died.

She would no longer come back again.

Though his father had told him that it wasn't his fault,

"....."

Things that complicated weren't solved so easily.

Though back then, he'd used his power without knowing, he knew

now.

He knew that if he were to use his power, someone would lose their life.

He knew that furthermore, someone important to him would lose their life.

Knowing that, it wasn't likely that he'd use this power again.

It was a power that slaughtered countless people to protect those he cared about.

At any rate, if he continued to use that power, the people around him would be no more...

"....."

Then, Ryner thought about the name of the monster within him.

Called the **Solver of All Equations,** he thought of the name of the demon.

That demon had introduced itself to Ryner.

It'd introduced itself as the Lonesome Demon.

Purely to save the Hero, a lonely demon that continously solved puzzles within the solititude of eternity—that was what it said.

Ryner narrowed his eyes at that, and,

"Lonely... huh? In other words, in order to save the **Hero,** it'd sacrifices the lives of all its friends?"

He thought about such a thing.

Though he still didn't know about what kind of being the demon inside his head was or what it was thinking, he knew that he shouldn't keep on using its power.

It was a power that was far too strong.

It was an aberrant power.

Furthermore, it was a power that would steal away the things important to Ryner.

It was fine if he died. It was fine if he were hurt. But if he couldn't use his power without sacrificing others, then he wouldn't use it.

That was why,

"... I won't use that power anymore,"

Ryner said.

Kiefer seemed strangely happy at that, and,

"I'm glad,"

She said such a thing.

In response, Ryner looked at her face.

"You're glad? But without that power..."

He began, but she interrupted him.

"It's fine if you don't use that kind of power. That kind of power will only bring about suffering."

"....."

"If you couldn't live without using that power, then the reasons why you'd absolutely have to have it would increase. If it's an unnecessary power, then it's fine not to use it. That's what I think,"

She said such things.

In response, Ryner stared at Kiefer, and,

"... Are those the words of Glouvil's wielder, Riphal Edea?"

He was about to ask, but he stopped.

After all, he already understand what was going on with Gastark's king—Riphal Edea.

Rather, he saw with these **eyes**.

Gastark's king offering up a part of his body as compensation for

activating that power to a girl with peach-coloured hair, who'd appeared from the mouth of that serpent—Ryner saw.

Already, Riphal Edea had sacrificed his eye, leg, and sense of smell to that serpent monster that danced through the sky.

Despite that, he continued to offer up more sacrifices.

In that battle, he'd presented his sense of touch.

It'd truly been done so easily.

The serpent that danced in the sky devoured Riphal's sense of touch, and in return, lent its power to him.

It lent its massive power.

However, the price of that was that he would no longer be able to come into contact with others.

He would no longer be able to feel another person's warmth.

Even if he were to be kindly embraced by another, he would no longer be able to feel anything.

"....."

That was a hefty price.

Like that, even if he were to rule over the world, there would be no meaning, Ryner thought.

So surely, his wish wasn't to become king.

It couldn't be about satisfying his own desires.

What his true wish was, Ryner didn't know. However, at the very least, the king of that country was sacrificing himself in order to advance forward.

Without depending on others, offering his own body as compensation, and while crying, he advanced foward.

Ryner knew just that.

And it was likely that Sion was the same.

No, the reality was that Sion cried.

The day of last time they'd met.

Although rain was pouring heavily and so it could've been that streaming down his face, he was crying.

While crying, he tried to kill Ryner.

He said that he would end it all there.

He said that he was sorry for not keeping his promise.

"....."

Whatever it was that Riphal was burdened with, Ryner didn't know.

Seeing as how Sion, the idiot, didn't talk about his own problems at all either, Ryner knew absolutely nothing.

But,

"....."

Ryner looked at his own palms.

He looked at his palms that'd killed over a million people.

Why he had such a power, he didn't know.

Despite that, he'd obtained that power.

He'd obtained a power that could break the world at the cost of those he cared about.

To say it plainly, he'd obtained the worst sort of power where it would be better if nothing happened.

And the first time one gained such a power, surely they would use it.

Sion cried over it.

Riphal cried over it.

And me as well.

"....."

He unfolded the right arm he received from his father, and then refolded it. As he vowed never to use that power a second time, he clenched his hand into a tight fist.

Then,

"... Well, although I say that, I can't trust Vois. At the very least, within the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, until I'm above Vois, I don't have much of a say in things."

Kiefer nodded at that.

"Right. I understand."

Continuing from there, Ferris said,

"Hey, Ryner, if you've decided that, then hurry up and enter the city already."

To such a random thing that didn't follow any chain of reasoning, as far as Ryner could tell,

"Haa? Decided what?"

Ryner asked, to which Ferris made the sort of expression that said that it should be obvious and spoke.

"Enforcing a tax system that favours dango in this country—your decision about that."

"Your point is?"

"Have there be a shop that produces delicious dango."

"Then?"

"How about a dango shop that closes late at night? If you have no complaints, then hurry it up,"

She said, and for some reason, withdrew part of her sword. Then, she slapped the bottom of Ryner's horse. As a result, Ryner's horse again let out a neigh before galloping forward.

"I *told* you, it hurts like hell when it runs..."

Ryner groaned, but this time, he didn't stop the horse.

After all, either way, he had to enter the city. Unless Vois's message was a lie, it seemed that Vois wasn't in the city right now.

In that case,

"If we get in quickly, then let's do a bit of undercover work before Vois returns."

Then, following behind him,

"That's my strong suit,"

Kiefer said such a thing.

"That?"

Ryner asked, to which she cheerfully replied,

"Undercover work comes with being a spy, doesn't it?"

"Ah~, right, Kiefer, you've had experience with infiltration stuff, huh?"

"That's right. On top of that, it'll be for Ryner's sake. Though, up until now, I've always been working hard for groups I didn't care for, I'll now be working for someone I do care for. Just from that alone, I feel like I can really do this."

For some reason, she spoke in a truly happy voice.

In response.

"....."

Ryner looked at her face.

Having received such courtesy from her in such a straightforward manner, he looked at her face.

She looked a bit embarrassed. As if waiting for his reaction, she had that sort of expression.

And regarding that, what would be the appropriate reaction, he again didn't know. He'd always adopted a manner in which he could pretend that he didn't hear and that he didn't notice.

"....."

But regarding what was the best thing to do right now, he thought a bit about his father—or whoever he was.

Love.

Love, was it?

Somehow, though he'd always felt lonely and that he couldn't come into contact with others, even if now one said suddenly that he was making contact and whatnot,

"Hey..."

Ryner said alone, at which Kiefer shook her head, and,

"Hey?"

"No, kindly ignore me."

"What's with the formality?"

"Ah, um? Ah~, just ignore me, okay?"

"Ahaha, you haven't changed."

"Pretty much, right?"

"Yeah."

"Right,"

Ryner said. Then, surpassing him from behind with great force, Ferris spoke.

"Mm-hmm. You never change."

In response, Ryner looked at her, and,

"I don't wanna hear that from you."

"Perverts don't change."

"Yes, yes."

"By the way, Ryner."

"Don't change the topic."

"Do you have any money to buy dango with?"

"Why do you have to use *my* money?"

"It's been decided by the law that the one who always goes into debt from buying dango is you, hasn't it?"

To such words, Ryner reminisced.

Of when he went around to different countries with a certain blonde-haired woman.

Of when he returned to Roland afterwards.

Though, in this scene, she was always selfishly using his name to take out loans and he was forced to suffer for her dango habits—

Regarding that, Ryner spoke.

"Ah, but in this country, I'm the almighty king, so I can skip on my bills as much as I like, right?"

Ferris made a surprised face and then pointed at him.

"Perfect!"

At such a gesture,

"Don't say that it's perfect. Honestly, what do you think will happen to the reputation of a king who skips on his bills?"

While saying that, Kiefer took out a purse from her pocket. From inside her purse, she took out a number of slips of paper and held them out.

"Here you go. It's Geihlficlant's currency. As the country is still being established, I don't think the currency has changed yet. So hold onto this."

As Ryner took the money, he spoke.

"For some reason, Kiefer, you're really prepared for everything, aren't you?"

She laughed cheerfully with a *fufufu*.

"I was praised by Ryner. ♡"

He nodded in response, and,

"Y'know, Ferris. This is the difference between her and a woman addicted to dango like you, huh?"

He said, to which the aforementioned dango-addicted woman replied,

"It's the difference between her and a man addicted to being a good-for-nothing, huh?"

"Geez."

"So, that money is mine."

"Don't say that so easily with such a serious look."

"I look only as serious as my words."

"Heh—oh, is that so? Well, then, um, Kiefer, hey..."

Ryner said, but before he could ask, Kiefer laughed. Taking out some more money from her purse,

"I prepared enough for three people."

"Reall? Then here, Ferris,"

Ryner said, handing the notes over to Ferris.

Then again, he took some money from Kiefer.

"Somehow, it feels kinda like I'm receiving my allowance or something."

As he said that, Ferris pressed her hands against her cheeks in a troubled manner and spoke. For some reason, with a slightly languid expression,

"I'm just a son who doesn't do any work at all, after all. Even though I'm already forty..."

"All right, so let's hurry up and enter the city..."

"Don't ignore me."

"Um, then let's get on with finding the headquarters, or at an inn, regarding the city's circumstances..."

"I *said*, don't ignore me!"

Ferris again exclaimed. Furthermore, though he hadn't heard it in a while, he then heard a familiar sound that he'd grown to hate, and,

"Seriously?"

Ryner said.

He felt something hit his head—the blunt edge of a sword, wasn't it? It had to be the blunt edge of Ferris's sword!

And as that sword struck his head with all its might,

"Gya—"

He let out a cry, falling from his horse.

Like that, he tumbled down onto the ground, collapsing before the city gates.

The guards keeping a watch over the gate made shocked expressions, and though in that moment, he thought that he was going to be apprehended for certain,

"A-Are you all right!?"

For some reason, they sounded concerned.

At that, not moving an inch from where he was lying on the ground, Ryner replied.

"No, I'm not."

However, in response, Ferris, sitting on her horse, spoke.

"No, he's a masochist who enjoys this."

With surprised faces,

"I-Is that how it is?"

The soldiers said such a thing, to which she nodded.

"Just now, this pervert yelled, *'If somebody doesn't hit me right now, I'm gonna kill myself!'* and so I grudgingly hit him."

"Uh, I see?"

Listening to such a conversation, Ryner looked up from the ground with half-closed eyes, and said,

"I swear I'm gonna kill you?"

"Then try it."

"Though how should I put it... this kind of thing really takes me way back."

At that, Ferris spoke.

Without looking at him, as if she were completely ignoring him,

"Mm-hmm. It's a little fun, isn't it?"

She said such a thing.

In response, Ryner looked up at Ferris.

Come to think of it, up until now, they'd been so preoccupied with the war, she'd been surprisingly docile; however, perhaps she'd been purposely holding herself back because of their situation.

He smiled wryly at that.

"It's fun, huh?"

He retorted, to which she nodded with surprising honesty.

"Yeah."

"But now I'm hurt, y'know."

"You're the one who said that there would be problems if I didn't hit you."

"Haa~? When did I ever... well, if you're having fun, then I guess it's fine,"

He said, getting to his feet.

And again, the soldiers asked,

"Are you really all right?"

Ryner nodded at the question.

"I've gotten used to it."

"Eh, you've gotten used to it...? A-Ahhh~, i-is that how it is?"

"Huh? Wait, wait, wait, I think you guys are getting the wrong idea here..."

"No, no, don't worry. There are all sorts of people here... so please relax. Here in the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, we're open-minded..."

"You have the wrong ideaaaaaaaa! Um, uh, well, I guess there's no point in trying to correct things, huh?"

Ryner groaned, at which point Kiefer, who'd apparently disembarked at some point, spoke in a quiet voice.

"What should we do? Do we give our names and enter? Or should we hide..."

She began, but then one of the soldiers—

"We've been waiting for you, Your Majesty."

They said such a thing.

Moreover, the voice was familiar.

It was a sharp, female voice.

The woman emerged before Ryner.

Long black hair, navy blue eyes. A tall, slender body dressed in a combat uniform.

If he recalled correctly, this woman was Vois's close aide, named Harmit.

She spoke.

"Everyone, this is the one who drove away Gastark's soldiers, Ryner Lute-sama. Please treat him with respect,"

She said.

From that alone, all of the soldiers tensed at once. And in a fitting voice, they asked,

"That's him?"

"Certainly, the rumours said that he was a pervert."

"Though Vois-sama did call the Demon King the world's number one pervert, that's the genuine article."

Ignoring them, Ryner turned towards Harmit. And he spoke.

"Ryner Lute-sama? Even though you don't mean that."

She replied,

"I was told by Vois-sama to treat you as a king."

"Heh. As a king, huh? Even though the true king is Vois?"

"The king is you."

"... Ha. Well, it's fine. We've come here to talk with Vois."

Then he looked over his shoulder and spoke to Kiefer and Ferris.

"Seems like we've already been exposed."

While smiling wryly,

"It couldn't be helped,"

Kiefer said.

Though the fact that it couldn't be helped was entirely the fault of Ferris hitting him,

"It's all because of your stupidity that the plan failed,"

As usual, Ferris dared to utter such a thing.

In response, while making an astounded face,

"I guess so,"

Ryner said, letting out a sigh.

And again he turned towards Harmit.

"So?"

He asked.

She smiled, and,

"Allow us to welcome Your Majesty to the throne room."

Saying that, she turned on her heel.

It seemed that she wanted him to follow.

Opening the city gates, she went inside.

At that, while following her, Ryner said,

"Throne room, huh? So is that where I'm gonna be confined?"

Without looking over her shoulder,

"How amusing,"

Harmit said.

In response, after looking behind him to make sure that Ferris and Kiefer were following as well, he questioned further.

"So, according to the signs that we read, Vois isn't here right now?"

"Correct."

"Where is he?"

"I..."

"You don't know?"

"Yes."

"Or is it that you're not allowed to tell me..."

He began, but Harmit shook her head.

"I simply don't know. If you wish to know, then I shall investigate."

However, Ryner waved a hand at that.

"It's fine. I mean, even if I asked, I've got no way of knowing whether or not you're telling the truth. But it looks like Vois really isn't here,"

Ryner said, while looking around at the city.

Again, the city's situation was slightly different from Roland's. Firstly, the roads here were wider than Roland's. The liveliness of the number of people here was also different.

Furthermore, within the streets, there were a great deal of signs.

They seemed to be related to the People's Republic of Sphelliyet's trade, and then about political objectives.

"... All of them are political objectives that I, the mighty, so-called king, know nothing about, huh?"

He said sarcastically, to which Harmit looked over her shoulder

with an apologetic expression, and,

"That's on account of it being an abnormal period right now—from now on, I believe that Your Majesty shall also participate in the politics."

"Is that what Vois said?"

"....."

"Did he give you orders along the lines of putting me in a good mood?"

Harmit smiled at that, and,

"Yes,"

She said easily.

Ryner smiled back.

"Ah, just as I thought. Well, since you answered so honestly, I *am* in a good mood. Then, you can drop the formalities now, got it?"

"All right, though it doesn't matter."

"Then, is there something else you wanna talk to me about that doesn't involve sucking up to me?"

However, she shook her head.

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all. Until Vois-sama returns, I was to act as Your Majesty's assistance—as those were my only orders, I have nothing else to say to Your Majesty,"

She said.

And she pointed ahead. In front of them was a sole, still carriage.

"Now, head inside that carriage. It shall guide you to the headquarters."

Saying only that, she again began to silently move ahead.

Staring at her back,

"... Geez, you wouldn't expect a subordinate Vois's to be so diligent. Well, but that Relca girl was like that too,"

Ryner muttered.

Once more, he looked at his surroundings.

At the streets.

Where Ferris stood.

Where Kiefer stood.

And then, at the soldiers around them.

Looking at that,

"If it's us, escaping would be easy, wouldn't it?"

Ryner said, to which Ferris replied,

"Yeah. Are we going to?"

But Ryner shook his head.

"Even though Vois knows just how strong we are, he only put up this degree of defence around us. In other words, he's not trying to keep us here using brute force. In that case, he might actually want to talk things over with us to decide how this country will be run."

Kiefer nodded at that.

"Vois-kun saw that power of yours, Ryner... maybe, right now, when it comes to leadership..."

"It'll be in our hands?"

"Yeah."

"Then, it looks like I can't talk about not wanting to use that power anymore, if I wanna be able to get a hold of any authority in this country,"

Ryner said, again looking around him.

He looked at the soldiers who were obviously once part of the Anti-

Roland Coalition who adored Vois.

He couldn't think of a simple way to get those guys to direct their loyalty towards him instead.

It would be the same for the people dwelling here. Regarding the former people of Geihlficlant, if Ryner were to suddenly shout, *"I'm the king!"* then there was no way they would follow him, just like that.

"... I just don't have the same charismatic aura as Sion. I mean, that's how he became Roland's precious king so easily, isn't it?"

He said, now surprised.

But that guy had worked as hard as he could.

And that was why, Ryner, who'd drifted by each day, had grown so far apart from him.

That's how it's ended up like this. From now on, it's my turn to work hard.

"... But what should I be working hard on? Practice smiling like a seemingly good person?"

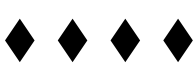
While saying such idiotic things, he stepped into the carriage.

Ferris and Kiefer followed suit.

Then Harmit gave the orders to the coachman.

"To the central army residence."

With that, the carriage began to move.



In a slightly different location.

Central continent, eastern edge.

Nobody could discover that place, due to the barrier that stretched around it. However,

"Hey, I've come."

That man easily appeared.

At that, Ene raised her head.

But her eyes were unable to reflect reality.

Because she'd used too much of her power.

Because she'd used too much of her power to see the future, she lost her ability to see reality.

Nevertheless, she knew what kind of figure the man who'd appeared before her had.

She'd already seen it.

She'd seen the scenery of the future.

Beautiful golden hair, a seemingly sleepy face that closely resembled Ryner's.

With eyes that reflected nothing and a tired voice, she turned towards him and spoke.

"Lieral?"

The man replied,

"Yes. You're the **Torch Curse** bearer?"

She nodded.

"That's right. Ene Lune."

"Ene... Ene-chan? My, I never expected the mastermind behind the Cursed Eye bearers to be a pretty little girl. I only knew that you were female."

At such words, Ene smiled.

"My appearance belies my age."

"Ah, if I remember correctly, with the **Torch Curse**, each time you use your power, your body dies, right? Your growth stops, and you become blind."

"..."

"With your ability to see the future, you can't avoid the **Goddesses** that are taboo, right? That backlash is amazing. Is it painful?"

He asked, to which Ene replied,

"Because the likes of you are not touched by such taboo."

"Ahaha."

"Isn't it painful for you?"

"Perish the thought."

"Don't lie. I see you, always crying..."

However, Lieral interrupted her.

"As long as I can save my son, it doesn't matter what happens to me."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah."

"You love him, don't you?"

"Of course."

"Even at the cost of the world?"

"Is that a problem?"

At that, Ene shook her head.

"Though I am no longer able to conceive... Surely, if I had children, I would feel the same way as you."

"Thank you kindly for your understanding... but you're my enemy, are't you? You ordered that **Iino Doue**—Tiir-kun to kill me."

Ene nodded at that.

"Yes, that's right."

"Why did you do that? Do you see me as a hindrance?"

At that question, though, she simply smiled sadly, and,

"... For whatever reason, the current plot of this world is terrible, isn't it?"

In return, she asked that.

To that, Lieral easily replied,

"Because no one else sees us."

"..."

"We cry, we shout, but no one hears... The world's cruelty knows no limits."

"Is that why you went against it?"

"Yeah."

"You're a celebrity now. Within the world, eyes are on you. Even the **Goddesses**, **Demon**, and **Priests** fear you."

"Is that right?"

"It is."

"Well, that's because I deceived them all. Then, do you fear me as well? Is that why you tried to kill me?"

Lieral asked; however, Ene shook her head at that as well.

"I pity you."

"Heh, and why is that?"

"Because you've been deceived."

In that instant, she felt the air of the man before her change. Though he'd been serene earlier, his air changed to that of a sharp blade.

Lieral spoke.

"Deceived?"

"Yes."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"... Where did I make a mistake...?"

"You were mistaken from the beginning. That..."

"That's not what I'm asking."

Lieral raised his voice slightly.

At that, Ene's expression saddened.

While pitying this man who desperately devoted his life for the sole purpose of protecting his son,

"I tried to protect Ryner from you. You're hurting him."

"That's—"

"You shouldn't have met with Ryner. You're bound by a curse. One with the purpose of destroying him. Though should you die, the curse will be undone... that won't be enough,"

She said.

Then she raised her face. As one who saw the future, she raised her face.

And she spoke.

"There exists a mastermind behind your back. They let you wander freely. They protected you. And they've obtained what they desired. You... you and your wife are pitiable, you know. Even though you did all you could, in the end you hurt your son."

Lieral didn't respond to such words.

He seemed to be thinking hard over something.

"... Curse... a curse? A curse inside of me to hurt Ryner? But who in the world...?"

There, he asked her,

"The **Hero**?"

"Wrong."

"The **Goddesses**?"

"No."

"The **Priests**?"

He began, but Ene shook her head.

And she replied,

"A sole monster who wishes to kill them all. He's the same as you, entirely. A sole being that touched the cogwheels of fate that **Humans** and **Gods** should never touch, and is a screw that's lost its place."

"That's..."

"Your son—Ryner, they let him be born as an **Alpha Stigma** bearer. From the beginning, they were making use of your superior ability..."

"Wha—impossible. That can't... that can't be—then Ryner and Iruna, because of me..."

"It's not your fault—though even if I say that, you'll surely blame yourself. That's why I've been wondering. Why things are like this, why the world is so cruel—I've always been wondering."

"....."

"No one else sees us? Perhaps that's true. If there was someone who was watching this, pulling at the strings, then we should head there immediately and kill them. After all, it's too despicable of a hobby, isn't it?"

Then, Lieral spoke.

"This person manipulating me—who in the world are they?"

"If I tell you their name, what will you do?"

"I'll go and kill them."

"That's impossible for you."

"How so?"

At that, Ene again smiled pityingly.

"Though I can't see your expression right now... you shouldn't make that kind of face. That's why I tried to have you killed as soon as possible. To kill you while you didn't know the truth."

"Hurry up and tell me..."

However, interrupting him, Ene spoke.

"I'll tell you. But there's nothing you can do on your own. Let's work together. To you and to me, Ryner's a very important person. That's why..."

"Hurry up and tell me their name,"

Lieral said. And his hands grabbed Ene's neck.

At this, she—

"If you go, you'll die. I've already seen this outcome."

"Heh, is that right? But you also saw the outcome where Tiir killed me, didn't you? Surprisingly, your eyes were off."

"... They weren't. As long as I tamper with it as little as possible, the future I see doesn't change."

"Well then, you tampered this time? As it seems that I wasn't killed by Tiir-kun..."

"No. I didn't nothing. And as for being killed by Tiir, that will happen afterwards. I want to change that. If you leave now by yourself, you will be killed."

"By Tiir-kun?"

"Tiir is also being manipulated. But I want to prevent that. Just a bit, just a bit more of my time… "

"... Useless,"

Lieral said. Now, though, he sounded as if he were about to cry.

"Honestly, as I don't believe in anyone, I refuse to listen to your words. That I was manipulated... because of me... because of me, Iruna was... what happened to Ryner, and whatnot? In that case, in

that case, I..."

"... That's enough. I'll tell you their name. But don't go alone. Together..."

"Rejected."

"In that case, please kill me. I'll die soon either way. If I'm killed here by your hands, then that was to be my fate. If my life can save you, then…"

"……"

"Now, please kill me."

"……"

However, Lieral's hands didn't tighten around Ene's neck.

He merely shook feebly.

Ene smiled sadly at that. Her hand reached out and touched his hair. Stroking that soft hair,

"… It’s all right. We’ll do something about this,"

She said.

"Even though Ryner has ended up like this, even in his solitude, he has your blood flowing through him."

At that, with a parched voice, Lieral let out a laugh.

And,

"… My bad, I lost control of myself. Now, what was that? Because of me, my son is cursed?"

Ene smiled at that.

Because she could feel the future in her sight change in that moment.

Because she felt the future that she saw before being effortlessly changed, as it began to fade.

But nevertheless, the curse on Ryner didn't disappear.

The plot drawn by the monster whose thirst for endless despair didn't change.

The curse laid on Ryner—

The curse wasn't considerable.

It wasn't something that needed to be worried about on an everyday basis—it was trivial.

Lieral asked,

"What in the world did I do to Ryner?"

And to that, Ene responded,

"Only an instant. In only an instant, Ryner's eyes were cursed…"

However, then, she opened her eyes wide. In her sight was the scenery of the future, as it began to unfold.

Lieral's future changed, and a new one was laid in its place.

To turn towards that future, she opened her eyes.

She opened them wide.

In their center, a strange pattern arose. Like a bird about to take flight, a vermillion design.

And as she offered more of her life as payment, she saw the future.

In return for sacrificing her own, she was able to see the future.

And reflected in her eyes was—

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Three days after Ryner and co. had entered the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, Vois still hadn't returned.

During that entire time, Ryner had been lying in bed in the room prepared specifically for him, clutching his pillow and reading over documents.

In them, talk of which direction this country was going to head in and things about politics and laws were written down, as immediately after Vois returned, Ryner wanted to be able to participate in guiding this country—so this was preparation for that.

While reading those papers,

"... Some~how, it's like the work I did with Sion,"

Ryner muttered such a thing.

Reorganizing the Roland Empire that had always been toyed around by the nobles, the two of them frantically worked on paperwork day after day.

Day after day of *"There's way too much paperwork—are you trying to kill me!?"*

Reminiscing slightly over that,

"... Don't tell me that once we get this country up and running, I'm gonna have to go through that all over again? That's a joke, right?"

He said, grimacing.

Of course, that wasn't a joke, since as a new country being established, there were several things to be decided on.

He continued reading the documents with an exasperated air.

The country that Vois and co. had established was better than he thought.

At the very least, it couldn't compare to the previous Roland. If it were possible, it'd be nice if it could become the place that he and Sion had dreamed of creating.

"Well, you can pursue as many ideals as you want if they're only on paper... but—"

Nevertheless, if he tried, then it'd be fine even if he could help Vois, he thought.

Of course, if it was Vois, then what was written on these papers was mostly a bunch of lies to Ryner.

"... But still, it seems Geihlficlant is famous for its decent politics, so there's no way the people would follow under a half-assed reign, huh? Geez, things are gonna get pretty busy from here..."

While muttering such things, Ryner turned over the documents.

Furthermore, this country had amassed more than just the people and soldiers of Geihlficlant, with the people and soldiers of Nelpha, and on top of that, the soldiers of the Anti-Roland Coalition, which was formed of people from various countries.

With that kind of diverse collection, treating everyone equally, flourishing—those sorts of things would likely be difficult work.

That alone would take several years.

However, they didn't have the time to develop so slowly.

Right now, the Geihlficlant Empire had been divided into the north and south, which were expanding at a greater rate than the People's Republic of Sphelliyet, and on top of that, Gastark and Roland were also likely to invade.

Out of the three countries in the west side, there was the Ertolia Republic and Remrus Empire.

There was the possibility that those two countries would send in troops to attack the territory of the fallen Geihlficlant Empire.

That must be why Vois was currently skipping around, desperately trying to control the flow of information.

"So, we're seriously doing this? This is gonna suck so much, isn't it?"

He said, again groaning as he read through the documents detailing those kinds of complicated matters. Then he tossed those papers to the side. He buried his face into the pillow. At that point, his stomach began to growl.

"Whoa, I'm starving... but the bed is so comfy, I don't wanna get up,"

He said such idiotic things.

Incidentally, during these last three days that he'd spent in his room, he'd been reading documents and books this entire time.

If he were to fight with Vois for leadership, he couldn't afford to know nothing about this city and country, and so he'd been frantically gathering information.

First were the texts on region investigations, politics, and the situation of the people that Kiefer had borrowed from the library.

Next were the textbooks on Geihlficlant's magic compendium.

Last was the pile of papers Vois had prepared.

"... I'm so tiiiiiiiired—geez, even though I don't have Sion here, forcing me to pull all-nighters, I'm still doing that anyway, aren't I? I've really become a pushover, haven't I?"

He said, sitting up from the bed.

Though the bed was large enough that even if he rolled over three times, there'd still be room, it was covered in books and papers, so he couldn't move around much.

He stretched across the only remaining space on the bed. Then he let out a yawn.

And he looked around the room.

It was a large room. As a room for one person, it was needlessly large, giving off a bit of an uncomfortable air.

In that wide room was only a desk, a shelf that reached the ceiling, and this king-sized bed.

It seemed that it was an office room prepared specially for Ryner.

However, he'd been eating all of his meal and doing work only top of the bed, and nothing else.

"... I *really* don't need a room this big. They should've just given me a room with only a bed,"

He said such things.

Then, in the space that he'd created in his book-covered bed, he kicked at his surroundings to move them out of the way. Now he was able to roll over in the space that he'd made.

As his stomach growled again,

"Ah, I'm really hungry~. Is it time to eat yet?"

He said, looking up at the clock on the wall.

The time shown there was four o' clock in the morning.

As his breakfast was delivered at eight o' clock, there was still some time left.

Regarding that,

"I could go to the dining hall to eat... but would it be open at this hour? Ah, nope, there was Ferris's dango stock... Ah, geez, I'm getting really sleepy, so whatever. If I'm asleep, then I won't be hungry anymore,"

He said.

And he moved to close his eyes.

Just then, he heard a knocking sound at the door.

However, despite that, Ryner closed his eyes, and,

"....."

He ignored the knocking.

The knocking at the door continued.

"....."

More knocking.

"....."

More knocking.

"... Leave me alone."

More knocking.

"For crying out loud, there's nobody in the room right now!"

Ryner replied.

However, he then thought over it a bit, and,

"Ah, but if you're the food delivery guy, then feel free to come in!"

He said such things.

However, in response, the knocking continued.

Ryner scowled at the sound, and,

"Damn it, fine—who is it?"

He asked.

However, there was no response.

He raised his head at that.

He looked at the door with tired eyes.

"Ferris?"

He asked, but,

"....."

Unsurprisingly, there was no answer.

"Kiefer?"

"....."

"Don't tell me you're an assassin sent by Vois...?"

He said something like that, though he knew that that wasn't the case.

After all, he couldn't feel any killing intent from whoever was on the other side of the door. Their presence was also rough. He really didn't think that whoever it was intended on assassinating him.

In that case,

"Who is it?"

He said, getting up and moving off the bed.

The presence on the other side of the door made itself known again, as the knocking resumed.

Ryner frowned at that, and,

"I *said*, who is it? It's the middle of the night, y'know? You're being a nuisance to the neighbours,"

He said, to which the other party—

"Haha, what are you talking about? A nuisance to the neighbours?"

They said, laughing.

It was a male voice.

Moreover, it was a voice he recognized.

And regarding that, Ryner—

"....."

He was rendered silence at the man's voice.

Rather, his entire body tensed all of a sudden, and so he was unable to move.

After all, the owner of that voice wasn't someone who belonged here.

After all, there was no way the owner of that voice could be here.

In spite of that, the man spoke.

"Hurry up and open the door. It'll be troubling if I'm discovered by the guards, won't it?"

That voice that was far too familiar spoke.

At that, Ryner said,

"... D-Don't even try to pull that crap. Who the hell are you?"

As he asked that, the man replied.

"It's me, Ryner."

In response, Ryner spoke.

In a trembling voice, he asked this to the man on the other side of the door.

"... Sion?"

The man easily—

"Yeah, it's me,"

He said.

"Surprised?"

He said such a thing in a cheerful voice.

In response,

"....."

Ryner said nothing, however.

It was obvious that this shouldn't be happening. If that guy could come here so easily, then there was no reason for Ryner to work so hard.

It was so that he could meet with him again that he persevered so desperately.

So that Ryner could reach where he was one more time, he persevered.

"....."

Despite that, this guy claimed to be Sion.

On top of that, he introduced himself as Ryner's close friend with a voice that was just like Sion's.

"... What kind of hallucination is this?"

Ryner muttered.

"Someone sent from the **Goddesses** again?"

He said, gathering his strength as he prepared to fight.

And narrowing his eyes sharply,

"You're an idiot. Mimicking Sion like that... that's a bad joke. Even I get pissed off at something like that..."

He said, but then the doorknob turned, and,

"Ah, sorry, Ryner. The door was open,"

The man said such a thing.

"Can I come in?"

The man said such a thing.

Ryner didn't answer that.

If, by any chance, Sion truly had come here, he didn't know what kind of face he should be making.

On the other hand, if it were an assassin sent by the **Goddesses**,

they should already be aware of Ryner's power, and so it'd be a risky situation as they tried to kill one another.

"....."

Either way, due to his tenseness, Ryner couldn't move.

However, not caring about Ryner's feelings on the matter, the door opened.

Slowly, it opened.

From the other side, a sole man appeared.

Long silver hair that gave off a noble air, and sharp, strong-willed golden eyes.

It was *his* face.

He was here.

That appearance.

Though Ryner didn't know whether it was the genuine article or not, at the sight of Sion's appeareance, Ryner felt as if he were about to cry for some reason.

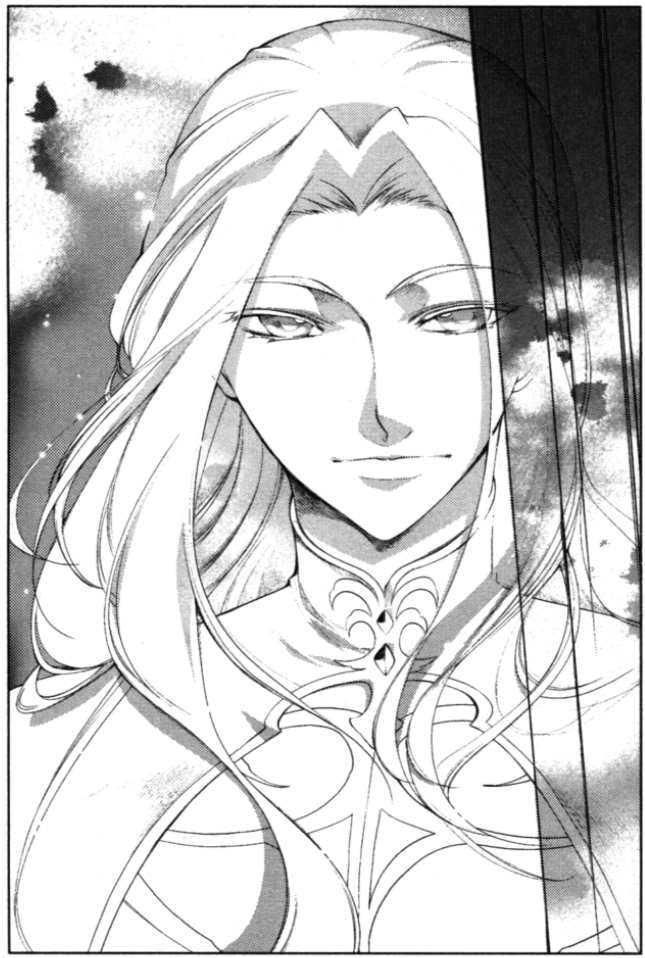
Furthermore, as the man looked his way, he smiled happily.

With a look of genuine happiness, he looked at Ryner's face, and,

"Hey, Ryner. Long time no see,"

He spoke with a nostalgic expression.

"....."



Nevertheless, Ryner didn't respond.

He opened his eyes wide. And he invoked the power of his **eyes**.

He invoked his **eyes** of the **Solver of All Equations** that could see through everything in the world.

In the center of his black eyes, a glowing, iridescent tear-shaped pattern appeared.

And with those **eyes**, Ryner looked at the man's appearance.

He stared at the appearance of Sion.

"....."

But even as he looked with those **eyes**, it didn't seem as if this man was an assassin sent from the **Goddesses**.

Without a doubt, this man was Sion.

That work-crazed, almighty bully of a king.

At that, unsurprisingly, Ryner couldn't move.

He looked at the face of Sion who'd suddenly appeared.

He looked at the face of his close friend.

"... Is it really you, Sion?"

"Yeah."

"Why are you here?"

"You ask why—to work Ryner to the bone, of course~."

"Don't screw around."

At that, Sion's expression became somewhat timid, and,

"... Yeah, right. You're right. Sorry,"

He actually apologized.

And in response, Ryner became frantic.

"Ah, no, that's not..."

He began, but Sion shook his head at that.

"It's fine. After all, I know why you're mad, Ryner. But it's too late now, isn't it?"

"....."

"Is it too late for us to be friends again?"

He said such a thing.

Ryner frowned at that. As much as he willed himself not to, he felt like crying again, and so he frowned in order to ward that off.

And glaring at Sion,

"Seriously, what's with you? You just selfishly disappeared from our lives, and now you're waltzing back in at your own convenience? What the hell are you thinking?"

Again,

"I'm sorry,"

Sion apologized.

At that, Ryner spoke.

"Honestly. Do you have any idea how much you made us worry..."

"Sorry."

"Ah, I told you—"

"I'm sorry, Ryner,"

Sion said.

At that, Ryner's words were again lost. With an exasperated expression, he let out a sigh. And,

"... Ah, it's fine. Anyway, so what? Uh, explain yourself. What the hell is going on with you? Actually, wait, why the hell have you chosen now of all times to show up?"

He asked, at which Sion smiled wryly, and,

"A few problems are cropping up. The situation's changed."

"What situation..."

"Ah, can I come in first?"

"That's not important... No, like I said, hurry up and explain yourself."

At that, Sion entered the room. Looking at the bed that was covered in books and documents,

"This is far too messy."

"Because there's too much help."

"Haha, well, it's not that different from my office~. Though you would know, Ryner."

"Geez, didn't I tell you!? Hurry up and explain yourself!"

Ryner said.

In response, Sion looked Ryner's way, and with a gentle smile—

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

In a slightly different location.

However, only slightly.

Outside Ryner's room.

In the corridor.

Ferris was there.

After locating the best dango shop on the streets, she'd come back with as much dango as she could stock up on for the morning.

"....."

Then, suddenly, she noticed it.

There was something strange in the corridor.

It was to the side of her room.

In front of Ryner's room.

In front of his room, someone stood.

But they weren't a person.

They didn't look anything like a person.

They had seven arms, a round head, and countless eyes.

And one of those eyes looked her way. Below that eye, something tore open. Something closely resembling a mouth tore open, as a smile arose.

One of those arms reached out towards her. It reached out as if it

intended to grab her.

She dodged it right away. She withdrew the sword at her waist. She moved to slice off that arm.

However, that didn't happen.

It caught her sword that could cut through iron, and,

"Guh—"

She took a step back.

However, during that entire time, the monster was laughing.

It cackled.

And like that,

"Ah, can I come in first?"

It said something like that.

In response, from within the room,

"That's not important..."

Ryner said something along those lines.

"Just what are you doing with him!?"

Ferris again swung her sword at the arm in front of her. However, as expected, it didn't cut through. An arm moved to grab her neck, which she avoided.

And again, she swung her sword.

This time, it was a stronger, sharper swing.

It met resistance. The arm tore. She continued to swing her sword again. Each time, the arm tore; however, the entirety of what she cut made no progress.

"What is this? This doesn't end,"

She said, ignoring the arm.

Like that, she kicked the wall and ran. Though the arm that was

reaching for her again shrinked in size and tried to pursue her, she was too fast.

Like that, she headed into Ryner's room.

During that time, this sort of conversation was taking place.

"This is far too messy."

"Because there's too much help."

"Haha, well, it's not that different from my office~. Though you would know, Ryner."

"Geez, didn't I tell you!? Hurry up and explain yourself!"

Regarding that, Ferris raised her voice.

"Hey, Ryner! Who in the world are you talking to!?"

He should've been able to hear her. She could hear their voices from over there.

In that case, Ryner should also be able to hear her voice.

But Ryner didn't answer.

As if he couldn't hear her voice at all, Ryner didn't answer.

In this period, the conversation continued.

That conversation with this unknown monster continued.

The monster spoke.

"Even if you say to explain, I don't know where to start."

"From the beginning."

"From the beginning, huh? Hmm~, anyhow, Ryner, how do I appear to you?"

"Huh? You haven't changed at all from before, y'know?"

"From before?"

"Just like before, you look like an incredibly annoying, upstanding young man."

The monster laughed at that, and,

"Haha, I see. That's how you see me... Then, that's a relief. I[1] shouldn't be approaching a monster from a different dimension like you. But with this, it's checkmate. I've gotten a hold of the demon—a perfect victory for me,"

It said such things.

Then Ferris finally reached Ryner's room.

Regarding the arm that was still pursuing her, she swung her sword and sliced it.

And she entered the room.

She entered Ryner's room.

"Ryner!"

She called his name.

However,

"....."

Already, Ryner was gone.

Not only that, but the monster that was present before was no longer there either.

Regarding that,

"... Damn it—what in the world just happened?"

She groaned, alone.

Translator's Notes

1. ↑ The first person pronoun here changes from *ore* (Sion's typical pronoun) to *boku*, making it clear that this isn't Sion, if it weren't obvious.

Back to Volume 7 Return to Main Page Forward to Volume 9